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DE GOURMONT

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REMY DE GOURMONT

Remy de Gourmont

Selections from All His Works
Chosen and Translated by

Richard Aldington

Illustrated with Photographs,
Drawings and Woodcuts by

André Rouveyre

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"Let us not allow the tradition of free minds to perish."
REMY DE GOURMONT

Second Edition, June, 1929.

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[The translator was unwilling to disfigure Gourmont's work by giving titles of his own to these extracts. But, to facilitate reference, the following table has been compiled. It should be noted that the dates given are those of publication, not of composition. In one case, the later preface to *Le Latin Mystique* has been given under the date of first publication.]

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1907

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Un Coeur Virginal, *Roman* [Mercure de France]

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1927

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INTRODUCTION

"Most who have written on the emotions, the manner of human life, seem to have dealt not with natural things which follow the general laws of nature, but with things which are outside the sphere of nature: they seem to have conceived man in nature as a kingdom within a kingdom. For they believe that man disturbs rather than follows the course of nature, and that he has absolute power in his actions, and is not determined in them by anything else than himself. They attribute the cause of human weakness and inconstancy not to the ordinary power of nature, but to some defect or other in human nature, wherefore they deplore, ridicule, despise, or, what is most common of all, abuse it: and he that can carp in the most eloquent or acute manner at the weakness of the human mind is held by his fellows as almost divine. . . .

"Nothing happens in nature which can be attributed to a defect of it: for nature is always the same and one everywhere, and its ability and power of acting, that is, the laws and rules of nature according to which all things are made and changed from one form into another, are everywhere and always the same, and therefore one and the same manner must there be of understanding the nature of all things, that is, by means of the universal laws and rules of nature. For such emotions as hate, wrath, envy, etc., considered in themselves, follow from the same necessity and ability of nature as other individual things: and therefore they acknowledge certain causes through which they are understood, and have certain properties equally worthy of our knowledge as the properties of any other thing, the contemplation alone of which delights us. And so I shall treat of the nature and force of the emotions, and the power of the mind over them, in the same manner as I treated of God and the mind in the previous parts, and I shall regard human actions and desires exactly as if I were dealing with lines, planes and bodies."

Spinoza's Ethics, part III.

INTRODUCTION

I

Quid ergo sum, deus meus? Quae naturae sum? Varia, multimoda vita et immensa vehementer.

S. Aug.

O God, what am I? Of what essence am I? A various multiform life of vast immensity.

St. Augustine

THE life of Remy de Gourmont was that of a studious recluse; it offers no startling episodes, no dramatic events. It was a life of intense mental activity lived out, so to speak, in the cell of a secular monk, manifested only in his writings. The true biography of Remy de Gourmont is his collected works.

There were Gourmonts in the sixteenth century, engravers and printers. Gilles de Gourmont printed at Paris in 1507 the first Greek book issued in France. These Gourmonts played a part in French humanism, predecessors, perhaps rivals, of the better known Estiennes. The

arms they used as a printer's mark are still those of the Gourmont family; but France has now no College of Heralds, and these arms as well as the title of Comte bestowed on Remy de Gourmont's father by some writers are perhaps not much more authentic than American genealogies. It is certain that the Gourmonts were country gentlemen of Normandy in the 17th and 18th centuries, that there were abbots in the diocese of Coutances who belonged to this Catholic family of the minor nobility.

Remy de Gourmont was the son of Auguste Marie de Gourmont and Marie Mathilde de Montfort and was born on the 4th of April, 1858, at the Chateau La Motte, Bazoches-en-Houlme, Orne, Normandy. When he was ten, the family moved north, nearer to the sea, to the manor of Mesnil-Villeman, in the department of Manche. Remy de Gourmont was educated at the Lycée of Coutances and in the Faculty of Law at the University of Caen. It appears that even in his boyhood the versatility and indiscipline of his mind were noticeable. When he was sixteen, his master, the abbé Lair, reported: "An easy, distinguished intelligence which he cannot learn to direct. He makes too many excursions into the field of fantasy." These priests are marvellous judges of character; that judgment applies to the mature as well as to the adolescent Gourmont, for those mental "excursions" at the call of whim remained one of his most valued sins. At the University he spent more time reading at hazard in the town library than in following his course. But this inability or

refusal to follow the dull lessons of dull masters is not uncommon in youths of talent, impatient to develop in their own way. A successful university career proves little but docility and a medium intelligence; which explains why women are so often successful. The original mind is generally more rebellious. The misfortune for Gourmont is that he was educated at a provincial university and not in the capital; had he spent those student years in Paris he would have been saved ten years of hesitations and fumblings.

It was not until 1883, when he was twenty-five, that Gourmont came to Paris, as assistant librarian in the Bibliothèque Nationale. His life seems to have been obscure and his literary talent developed slowly and along regrettable lines. He produced compilations for a publisher and contributed to an encyclopaedia, gratifying tastes or creating habits which he never entirely threw off. He appears to have had no contact with the active literary life of the time, but lived in some obscure district, spending his days between the Library, literary hack-work and (it would seem) unsatisfactory amours. The first number of Mallarmé's *Vogue* (1886) revealed to him the school of writers who had preserved or taken up again the Romantic tradition, and created the opposition movement to the Naturalistes which is generally known as Symbolisme. Gourmont was then twenty-eight, and it was not until four years later that the publication of *Théodat* showed the first tardy fruit of this literary conversion. Meanwhile,

he had come to know Villiers, Huysmans, Mallarmé; but his literary life was disturbed and stimulated in 1887 by his violent passion for Mme. de Courrière. This *liaison*—for some reason he did not marry her—accentuated his aloofness from society and appears to have lasted for the rest of his life. Even after the dazzling appearance of the American Amazon in Gourmont's life, Mme. de Courrière went on living in the flat next to Gourmont's.[1]

About this time occurred that facial disfigurement which completed his isolation from ordinary life and held him almost a prisoner in the solitude of his study for the rest of his days. This "accident to his health",[2] as it is discreetly termed, completely changed his appearance. M. Jean de Gourmont (his brother) has related that when Remy first returned home after this disfigurement, his own father did not recognise him. Yet, in spite of this misfortune and his natural shrinking from society, he was not abandoned by Mme. de Courrière and still enjoyed the fugitive contacts whose memory has peopled his books with so many feminine figures. This disaster must have occured about 1889, when the *Mercure de France* was founded. In 1891, an article in that review, directed against the French party which still clamoured for *la revanche,* was made a pretext to dismiss him from the public service.

[1]She wrote me a strange letter a few days after Gourmont's death; unfortunately, it seems to have been lost from my papers in the disturbance of the war years.

[2]It was a form of *lupus.*

Gourmont will have the sympathy of all independent persons in this affair. There are few factions so dangerous and exasperating in modern nations as the excessive nationalists of all countries, the "Jingos" of England, the "spread-eagles" of America. Their patriotism is offensive, narrow, truculent, indecent; their creed is an imbecile xenophobia and their existence a menace to international peace and national freedom. Urging war in time of peace, they are generally to be found in the rear administrations of war-time armies. Gourmont's protest was a little intemperate and stinging, but none but a furious nationalist would dissent from its views. However, his adversaries were powerful, and a man who is now considered one of the glories of France was dismissed ignominiously from the public service through the efforts of a journalist, the noisy mouthpiece of a dissolute faction.

This dismissal completed the ring of solitude which enclosed him. For a quarter of a century he lived his recluse life in the Rue des Saints-Pères, venturing only to the *Mercure* office, to the Café de Flore, and to the bookstalls along the quays. In the summer he spent a few weeks at his family home in Normandy. Otherwise his days were those of studious routine, and his only excursions were the literary and philosophical promenades of which he has left such agreeable accounts. Towards the end of his life this literary hermit was drawn from his cell by the charms of the Amazon. An American poetess living in Europe, Miss Natalie Clifford Barney, was attracted by Gourmont's

work and he speedily developed a violent affection for her. Under the influence of this passion he emerged from his solitude and his old friends marvelled to see him renewed in his work and to learn that he had ventured, first as far as the Rue Jacob, then to the Bois and other districts of Paris, under Miss Barney's guidance. He even attended Miss Barney's dances, once in fancy-dress, appropriately as a mandarin; and carried this life of society dissipation so far as to call on Anatole France. Considering Gourmont's horror of Americans and Americanism (he was equally prejudiced against the English and penned some fierce and slightly foolish diatribes against England during the Boer War) it is amusing to reflect that the charm and interest of his last years came from a native of America. It is with a pleased malice that I also reflect that this book in his honour will appear in Chicago, a city for which he professed a peculiar horror. How greatly one regrets that Miss Barney's plan for taking him to America was never carried out!

Though comparatively weak in health and subject to colds, Gourmont was not actually infirm in 1914, when the European war devastated all our lives.[1] He had been ill and was then convalescent in Normandy. The shock

[1]As an example of the real spiritual affection felt for Gourmont by his admirers I am tempted to give these two facts. During his military service M. André Rouveyre carried in his belt, as a sort of talisman, Gourmont's last letter to him. I bought a copy of *Les Chevaux de Diomède* during the war in the small

undoubtedly hastened his end. Already his *Dialogues of Amateurs* and his *Letters to the Amazon* had showed a mind profoundly disillusioned, a spirit plunged deep in a bitter nihilism. The war destroyed what little zest was left him in life. The letters written to me during the last eighteen months of his life (and published as an appendix to Vol. I) will show his lamentable state of mind and the dreary tasks to which he was subjected. My influence with the periodical press of England and America was even less then than it is now; I had to deal with people who knew little and cared less about Gourmont, while my own enthusiasm for his work was considered as a foolish young man's eccentricity. Now that Gourmont is famous and has even received such posthumous attentions as a statue in a public garden, a commemorative plaque on his house, a place in all the latest histories of French literature, much "appreciative" palaver, it is painful to remember how difficult it was to place his articles and to obtain adequate payment for them. But for Miss Amy Lowell the results would have been meagre; and I cannot think that two hundred dollars was a high price to pay for the complete manuscript of *Une Nuit au Luxembourg*. In England, Mr. Harold Monro and Mr. J. C. Squire were sympathetic and did what they could. One difficulty was that the breakdown in Gourmont's health and his profound depression

town of Hesdin, carried it with me into action, read and re-read it in the strangest and dreariest places, and still preserve it, a battered but valued relic.

of spirits resulted in poor work; and it was hard to persuade editors to pay for a reputation that had not yet reached them or their public. Perhaps the best work he did during this regrettable money-hunting was the two epigrams published in *Poetry* by Miss Harriet Monroe, for which she paid handsomely—at least, Gourmont thought so.

M. Jean de Gourmont has described how his brother was seized with his last illness, a haemorrhage of the brain:

"On Saturday evening, the 25th September, 1915, about 1:30, I leaned out of my window and noticed there was a light in Remy's flat. I thought he had forgotten to turn off his electric light; but I felt uneasy and went up to him. I found him collapsed in his wicker armchair near his writing-table. I tried to give him my arm but he collapsed and I had to carry him to the divan a few steps away from the table. In agitation I called Mme. de Courrière from the flat below and we laid him on the bed. While I felt his pulse, he gazed at me, questioned me with a very intense, an intense blue, gaze; I smiled at him to reassure him."

He died at six o'clock in the evening of the 27th September. The funeral service took place in the church of St. Thomas Aquinas, and Remy de Gourmont was buried in the Cemetery of Père Lachaise with the ceremonies usual at the interment of a French man of letters.

A good deal has been written by those who knew Gourmont personally about his appearance, habits and dwelling. A few selected passages of this kind are here appended.

M. Edmond Barthelemy gives this account of Gourmont in 1890:

"He received me in his apartment of the Rue des Saints-Pères which he afterwards left for a quieter one on the floor above, looking over the court-yard. It was a hot day. The shutters of the study were half closed and there was a gentle half-light in the flat. We heard the dull rumble of the three-horse omnibuses which at that period went down the Rue des Saints-Pères. Gourmont was dressed in a loose garment of black stuff, held at the chest by a metal clasp ornamented with coloured stones; the wide, opened sleeves showed his wrists, and his small hands, while he talked to you with his halting elocution, looking calmly at you with his large grey-blue eyes, were generally rolling a cigarette. He wore a sort of ecclesiastical skull-cap on his head."

M. Emile Magne describes this refuge in the Rue des Saints-Pères as follows: It contained a narrow rectangular ante-room, a tiny kitchen filled with book-shelves and with books on the stove, an immense dining-room, surrounded with book-shelves filled and double-filled with books; the study was walled with books, the armchairs and chairs of faded yellow velvet supported heaps of books, and more heaps of books filled every nook and corner; the view from this study was a piece of wall and a triangle of sky above the roof. . . . The same author goes on:

"Abashed perhaps by a slight difficulty of speech Remy de Gourmont was not very conversational. He hated mere

talkers as much as bad writers. . . . Before he became intimate with another man, he observed him silently for months, often without showing the slightest sign of sympathy or even of politeness."

Mme. Rachilde is characteristically sharp:

"The gentle Remy, a pale little man, with clear very blue eyes, slovenly in appearance, with no desire for neatness or the slickness of young literary apprentices to-day; he talked stammeringly, asserted nothing, then suddenly brought out a brilliant paradox[1] like a gentleman who, after all, does know how to use a sword."

M. Pierre Querlon wrote of him in 1903:

"He is not tall; his face is strong; his high wide forehead is square; his blue eyes shine clear behind his glasses, sometimes over or beside them. He walks along the quays, with books under the cape of his cloak. He goes up the Rue des Saints-Pères to his flat, puts on his black velvet robe, his felt skull-cap and sits down in the large wicker armchair of his study. Books are aligned from floor to ceiling."

M. Pierre Loüys wrote after his death:

"As far back as I can remember I have never met my old friend anywhere but in bookshops or in front of bookstalls. His ravaged face, which acquired a certain beauty of expression as he grew older, appeared from a distance to the frequenters of the quays between the soft hat and

[1]Remy de Gourmont detested paradoxes and never uttered them. By "paradox" Mme. Rachilde no doubt means an original idea.

the muffler. It was a rather sad and shy face disfigured by an unhappy life."

But by far the best sketch of Gourmont is that by my friend, M. André Rouveyre, whom I am about to pillage for the following excellent observations:

"When Gourmont went out with a friend, he contrived to urge the friend in front of him, chiefly at the departure, for thus he could better tackle the difficulties of his physical movements. . . .

"His body was very restive to his orders; its different mechanism needed an urge of the will to get into action. Nothing in his physical make-up seemed to go by itself with comfortable spontaneity. On the contrary, one saw that the animal would never obey. Owing to this fact, all his behaviour was indecisive, distorted, slow, abrupt. . . .

"Every one of his physical movements showed this hesitation and difficulty, which appeared even in his speech. All material life assailed him and put him to a perpetual combat; absolutely retired into his thought, and as a gradual result of a refusal of obedience by his general being, he found himself at bay. Reiterated orders were needed to make his body go and come. . . .

"He hardly ever allowed himself to be accompanied in the street, even by an intimate friend. Gourmont knew too well the mutual distress resulting from his embarrassment, the tyrannical disorder which rent him in the action of moving forward.

"Therefore he shut himself up in precise habits, where

a relative daily automatism could be installed. At the end of some time on the same route, the watchfulness over his body could be relaxed a little, a daily walk became possible. He then appeared happy. . . .

"The illness, from another age, which struck him and, in fact, dominated his mature life, had gnawed and sculptured his face, fixed the lower lip in the position of disdain. So that this, by morally surmounting it, corrected the slow disintegration of his face, burned, scarred, swollen near the lips; partly too white, dry and shining; partly rough, red and incontinent. Here and there it was as if livid clouds passed over it.

". . . the eyes made his face glitter with a dazzling nobility.

"He had ceased to laugh. . . .

"Gourmont's gaze (from bluish-green eyes, unfindable, they were so steady) carried his spiritual life; he was charged with such a power that a sensitive man could not sit opposite him without understanding his own weakness.

". . . a dazzling intellectuality came from him, chiefly from the eyes, whose rays were like rapid, piercing shafts of steel. . . .

"Gourmont, from his cloistered life, his condition and his spiritual elevation, was absolutely isolated, out of society. He behaved with a strange and painful awkwardness when necessity forced him into it. His oldest friends, who loved him, had to be prudent in talking to him. . . .

"From lack of practice he had no urbanity and his physi-

cal defect had added a restrained sharpness; but then there was a sudden, innocent joy when someone or some circumstance showed him, even if it were a delusion, that he was not the reprobate. Miss Barney was a happily opportune apparition in his life. . . . With her Gourmont was transfigured. . . . All his infirmities seemed to vanish. . . .

"In his own flat, dressed in his Trappist frieze, he looked to me like the devil forced to turn hermit.

"The atmosphere was panic, secret, shadowy, in his ill-aired, dusty domicile . . . the place was warm, padded, unendurable, unhealthy, and its shell was composed of piled-up, dusty books built by the hands of the solitary wandering in his quarter and along the quays. It lacked nothing but fresh air—air of any kind. An eagle's nest, a toad's hole. . . .

"With me his ravaged face smiled supernaturally, with kindness, intellectual attachment, good nature."

M. Rouveyre has written more indulgent pages on Gourmont, but I have preferred to give these fragments of intense vision[1].

The drawings by M. Rouveyre in this volume will show the almost cruel probity of his artistic conscience. These drawings, the photographs, and the above quotations should give a clear impression of Gourmont's outward man

[1] I have carefully avoided the insipid and insincere panegyrics of those who neither knew nor really admired Gourmont. At his funeral the inevitable deputy "saluted a great Republican" in Gourmont; regrettable that a corpse cannot laugh.

and life. For that other, more precious and, I am convinced, humanly imperishable Gourmont, the reader must meditate over the written word which is the record of an immense intellectual effort.

II

Remy de Gourmont was the complex product of an old and complex civilisation, "too complex, perhaps," as he wrote me with gentle irony when, with the hopefulness of youth, I had attempted to explain him in a short article. I am less hopeful now; and, just as much of his life is rather mysterious to us because of his obedience to the ancient precept "Hide thy life", so there are mysterious complexities in his thought and literary personality. Gourmont was a *polygraphe,* a writer of many kinds of literary works; and such writers are invariably suspected of superficiality. As I have written of another great French *polygraphe,* Voltaire, "we are unwilling to believe that a man could write so much so well". But this is merely the elementary or mathematical aspect of Gourmont's complexity, which is something very different from versatility and variety of interests. The personality of Voltaire is not very complex; he was a man of remarkable intelligence and opportunist character, whose expansive energy simulated a complexity which, on analysis, proves to be only variety. The complexity of Gourmont is real and inherent . The mind of Voltaire is like a perfectly turned billiard-ball, ever on the roll and continuously achieving the most accurate and pleasing angles;

the mind of Gourmont is like the same ball carved by a Chinese artist into a nest of highly fretted spheres one within the other, made heaven knows how and quite useless for the practical game of life. (Gourmont does make one think of the conventional idea of a lettered mandarin.) You may take two pieces of Voltaire's prose, one written in 1720, the other in 1770, and at once you will recognise them as products of the same mind; but compare Gourmont's work in 1890 with his work in 1905—is the sensual, mystic idealist of *Sixtine* the author of the sceptical, Nietzschean *Dialogues des Amateurs*? Already the mind which produced *Sixtine* was singularly complicated; but it passed rapidly through many phases, each of which left definite and permanent traces, until the resulting complexity baffles analysis. Yet it is always the same mind. Hence the "problem of Gourmont" which has never been seriously attacked by any one except M. André Rouveyre[1].

Obviously, simplicity is not the commonest quality in great writers, but rather the contrary. The excessive complexity of Gourmont, which the most superficial reader cannot overlook, is not so much something abnormal as an obstacle to a clear comprehension of his gifts and faults. To one long familiar with Gourmont's work it becomes a certainty that he was potentially a greater writer than in fact he ever became. There is already a considerable amount of waste-matter in his published work; already his

[1]See: *Souvenirs de mon Commerce* (1920) and *Le Reclus et le Retors* (1927).

stories and novels are in parts superannuated, his poems seem dated, his plays abortive experiments in an art for which their author was singularly unfitted. What is more serious, one cannot point to any book or books of his and assert honestly that it is a complete, successful and permanent masterpiece. Yet one has an even stronger conviction that the name of Remy de Gourmont will not perish, that his mind was not only curious and complex but a permanent addition to the vast gallery of European intelligence, that there are gifts both of artistry and thought scattered through his thirty or forty volumes which are original, powerful and animating. Writing was Gourmont's life; he adored it, and when he was not writing or reading for the purpose of writing, he was bored. He was as perfect a type of the man of letters—taken in its highest sense—as one could discover. He appears to have had scarcely any active interests outside the realm, though it is a vast one, of ideas. He did not travel much, too little in my opinion. He shows no knowledge or love of music. He looked at pictures—who can fail to do so in Paris?—and had considerable appreciation of them; but modern painting after the Impressionists eluded him, and his articles on Cézanne and the Indépendents are a little painful to an admirer. Theology, in his early days, science in middle life, deeply interested him, but from a literary and amateur's point of view. He was a recluse. Consequently his life was inactive, thrust back on itself; his thought was a magnificent rehandling of second-hand elements; his logic rearranged

material brought him by others; and instead of concentrating his genius, he dissipated it through a mass of writings all of high quality, but few or none of the highest. The chief reason for the present book is that it seeks to reduce this diluted thought to its essence. Repetition is not Gourmont's vice—he was alert and fertile enough—but dilution. He wrote too often because writing was a kind of sensual pleasure, an oblivion from common life, a gentle intoxication of the mind. That strange mingling of the priest and the sensualist, of the mystic in sentiment and the sceptic in intelligence, which forms part of Gourmont's complexity, explains his exclusive and unbridled passion for writing. In writing he found the priest's daily devotion and the lover's pleasures, the exaltations of mysticism and the detached contentment of the scientist. He wrote to please himself, he wrote as a self-indulgence. More, his writing was often a form of morose delectation.

Gourmont's genius was essentially critical, and almost to the end he persisted in regarding it as apt for any literary task he liked to set it. His intellectual curiosity was superb. He refused to give it any limits; he refused to accept any limits as a writer, and that is coming perilously near the frontiers of journalism. Art insists on limits, whether inherited or self-imposed. It is strange that Gourmont, who admired Flaubert so much, did not make a stricter use of the principle implied in Flaubert's methods. Flaubert chose, and upheld his choice with agonized persistence. Gourmont, a born critic, was never able to quash the poet

in him for the benefit of his criticism, as Flaubert quashed the wild Romantic in himself for the benefit of his realism. ("Madame Bovary, c'est moi.") An even more serious result of this disregard of limits is that Gourmont, probably without knowing it, descended from the rank of critic to that of populariser. The distinction is a valid one, which does not need defending. It is disturbing to remember that Gourmont began his literary career with a series of hack compilations which nobody reads and which ought to disappear from his bibliography; but the taste remained—and was gratified—even when he had developed into a first class writer. It is possible for an artist (I am thinking of the great Italians like Leonardo, Michaelangelo, Bernini) to animate all the arts with an exceptionally energetic genius. Yet is not Leonardo a warning? And it is certainly possible for poet, critic and philosopher and even scientist to live in one great mind. But Gourmont was not Goethe. True, the whole irregular mass of Gourmont's production is held together loosely by the thread of his personality; but that personality was indeed *ondoyant et divers*, wavering and diverse. I doubt whether his energy was sufficient to carry on all these campaigns with success; he divided his intellectual army too much—a great strategical fault—and sent his forces against too many provinces. To drop these military metaphors, let me put it this way: Gourmont did not succeed like Sainte-Beuve, in subordinating his imaginative, creative gifts to the benefit of a great critical work; nor, like Walter Pater, did he succeed in fusing

imagination and critical intellect in a pleasing hybrid. The work of Sainte-Beuve is a whole, and the work of Pater is a whole; but the work of Gourmont is a series of brilliant parts which only just cohere.

III

The above section has been written chiefly for a few people, long acquainted with Gourmont's work, who may open this book. But a translation must aim necessarily at reaching those who have not studied an author in the original and who probably make his acquaintance for the first time. While, therefore, it has been obvious that I am fully aware of Gourmont's defects and that I do not claim an excessively high place for his works, I must make it equally plain to those who come to him for the first time that I rank him high among modern European authors, far higher than ordinary official criticism will allow. As a novelist I think him certainly inferior to Flaubert, but I put him with Huysmans and France. As a philosopher and essayist I hold him inferior to Nietzsche but considerably above Maeterlinck. He was perhaps the most erudite non-specialist writer of his age, and as a general critic he was unique in his generation. Mr. T. S. Eliot calls Gourmont "the critical conscience of a generation", and I eagerly borrow the phrase. Gourmont was indeed the critic of the Symbolistes, using that vague term in its widest sense. If he had done nothing but his work for the *Mercure de France,* he would be important, for the *Mercure de France*

was the centre of a whole new literary movement, which left considerable traces in French literature and influenced many foreigners. But Gourmont was a great deal more than the valiant defender of a new generation, exposed, as usual, to the insults and opposition of the successful literary traders. He was a great Individualist, one of the last and boldest defenders of individual liberty against the increasing tyrannies of democracy and socialism.

This book contains (I hope it is not an idle boast) the essence of thirty volumes and a life-work of intense thought. I try to imagine how I should feel if I came upon its contents for the first time, and I think I should be as excited and captured as when I first "discovered" Gourmont (through F. S. Flint and Ezra Pound) some fifteen years ago. But I also try to imagine what may be usefully said to those who will not be spontaneously conquered, to provide a thread for the safe exploration of this labyrinth. I can see there are some for whom Gourmont will be an immediate delight, but for others almost every thought and page in this volume will be an offence. The already converted and the unconvertable need no attention; but there are many who might be benefited by this sharp pungent thinker, this agreeable sensualist, if their prejudices were lulled.

Let us make no mistake about it; Gourmont's art and thought are profoundly revolutionary, not in the conventional, Moscow, barbarous way, but in the subtle, acute, elegant, delicately graduated way of a highly civilised, over-

civilised thinker. He is the greatest of the intellectual Nihilists foretold by Nietzsche, after whom there is—what? Gourmont is the unfailing champion of Individualism—of Egotism if you like—and the one clue to his multiple and complex personality and work is a recognition of this uncompromising Individualism. He is the defender of liberty of expression, liberty of morals, liberty of action. Perhaps he claimed the impossible, but only the efforts of these uncompromising Individualists have saved us so far from a new Middle Ages of dreary collective tyranny. Everywhere the interests of the group are preferred to the interests of the individual; everywhere, as Gourmont pointed out, the insane process is occurring of making great groups happy by destroying the personal happiness of every individual in the group. Everywhere liberties, the liberty to love, the liberty to drink what we please, the liberty to travel, the liberty to work, the liberty to enjoy, the liberty to express opinions contrary to those of the majority, to doubt the gods of the herds and the herd-leaders, the liberty to be happy in one's own way—all these liberties are being abolished or curtailed in the name of frothy social theories or the deplorable slave morals of the gospels. All Gourmont's work is a magnificent protest against the over-organisation of society for the benefit of human mediocrity. The life and work of Huysmans are an artist's exasperated protest against the exterior of industrialised life. Gourmont is far more profound, if less exquisitely an artist. Accepting the science which Huysmans rejected in horror, Gour-

mont went deeper, analysed and exposed the delusive theories and ideas which have been developed by confused but persuasive minds from our chaos of moribund but still vicious religions and vital but uncertain and over-assertive sciences. The attentive reader of the second volume of this book will see how Gourmont applied his individualist method to the analysis of a vast number of problems, views, opinions, beliefs, religious, philosophical, literary, social, moral, sexual. A great critic of literature, a greater critic of ideas, and a still greater critic of humanity.

It is not enough, however, to say that Gourmont was an Individualist. With him one must always qualify, always elaborate. In his Individualism there was nothing harsh, vulgarly assertive, selfish. In him Individualism was qualified by a fine sensibility, an exquisite intellectual probity, a profound culture. His mind was infinitely subtle and delicate. This delicacy, this subtlety are conspicuous in the sensuality which was so powerful a motive in Gourmont's work. Let me say at once that I do not apologise for Gourmont's sensuality; I admire and praise it. I consider it a most valuable contribution towards the freeing of intelligent men and women from the bondage of Christian prudery and the disgusting coarseness which is the inevitable reaction. Those nations which most fiercely repress the pleasures of the sex are those where the greatest coarseness and hidden license are generated. As Gourmont was never weary of showing, there is an imperfect "dissociation of ideas" due to the fact that people are too cowardly to

defy the Christians and too lazy-minded, too insensitive, to resolve the subject in a healthy and joyous manner. Among the more ordinary and vulgar minds, the idea of sex has never been dissociated from the idea of the digestive functions; consequently a "dirty" jest may be made indifferently about either the most exalting or the most humiliating of bodily functions. To the sensualist this vulgar confusion, which is the corollary of Christian prudery, is deeply revolting. It is truly "obscene" just as the prudish denial of sexual pleasure, the endeavour to hush it up, scuffle it out of sight, divert from it the minds of the young when Nature has brought them to the point when their lives should be irradiated with sexual happiness, is "obscene". Many minds above the coarse vulgar have dissociated the sexual from the digestive fact; but they have not learned to dissociate the sexual from the procreative act. All our sexual legislation is based on the assumption that the sexual act must be procreative. It considers one end only: the unlimited supply of new citizens to be reared at the expense of their progenitors. I am not going to enter on the familiar controversy of birth control; it is obvious to me that no amount of puritan legislation will prevent it and that the more highly intelligent a nation is, the wider birth-control extends. Gourmont's sensuality involves another, more personal, more interesting fact—that with civilised man sexual love is not only an instinct but an art. Here, as everywhere, Gourmont is the Individualist, always opposed to the Christian theory of repression. His method, which

I am convinced is the true way of civilisation, is to refine through liberty the passions which cannot be suppressed without reducing mankind to the level of an ant-hill. Insensibly I find myself expounding a Gourmont doctrine; but the very essence of Gourmont's thought is that he placed himself quite apart from doctrines and parties. It was a Nietzschean effort to rise "beyond good and evil". But this uncompromisingly individualist judgment does not necessarily reduce Gourmont to a minority of one. Inasmuch as every one of us is an individual, inasmuch as we exist more or less apart from collective bodies and opinions, Gourmont speaks to us. He speaks to us not as members of groups, not as citizens, but as individuals. He does not assert that he has anything valuable to tell us; he does not pretend to solve anyone's problems, offers no panacea, makes no promises, cares nothing whether he is read or not, or, if read, whether anyone accepts or rejects his thought. "The world is my representation", he says (under the influence of Schopenhauer), adding characteristically, "and yours too, my brother". This quality he called "disinterestedness" by which he meant the attempt to know and to say what is or seems to be, without reference to any preconceived hypothesis, and without any regard to personal prejudices. Consequently he was always ready to change his mind, always prepared to deny to-day what he had asserted yesterday, not from inconsequence and incoherence but because the complex relation of things seemed to have altered or because he had learned something

he did not know before. He had the intellectual probity of the great Sceptics. Those who like a simple world, all black and white without any gradations of shadowing, object to this type of mind. According to them the Sceptic has no convictions, hence is not "serious," is a "dilettante". This will not do; for if the Sceptic can show by irrefutable analysis that these convictions are erroneous, based on misunderstanding or prejudice, have in fact no counterpart in nature, then the Sceptic has performed a service of liberation. Where is the virtue of being blind or one-eyed? But the ruthless criticism of a sceptic like Gourmont may be dangerous to weak minds? I do not deny it, but retort that a male adult writer has no need to consider the possible effect of his thought on the weak-minded, any more than he need worry about the effect on virgins of expressing his sensibility. Still one must recognise this *impasse:* Gourmont shows that all action and every motive for action is vain, and yet he is compelled to assert that everything which provides a motive for action is necessarily good, i. e. because life is an end in itself, and without action there is no life.

The European war imposed action on millions; it also destroyed the motives for action apart from itself. Consequently we have since witnessed feverish efforts to establish convictions, to build up doctrines containing an imperative. The efforts are useless; Gourmont's criticism remains intact. It is useless to seek a sanction for life outside of life. So penetrated am I with the spirit of scepticism

that I cannot regard the post-war philosophic and religious constructions as anything but temporary shelters for the timid. True to the principle of Individualism, let us not attempt to pull others out of their little intellectual dug-outs where they feel safe and permanent; but let us rejoice that some prefer to remain outside.

Obviously, in a last analysis, all doctrine, all opinion are equally vain. We may think that certain liberties provide more opportunity for individual happiness, and we may think that individual happiness is important. Rough common sense would seem to assert this, but men are so curious that they may realize the paradox of being happy by abandoning personal happiness, of abandoning liberties for the benefit of any one among a number of delusive promises of collective happiness. Consequently, the true value of a writer like Gourmont does not lie wholly in his views but in the quality of the mind by which those views are elaborated and illustrated. One is not to accept any statement, however undogmatic, as dogma. Gourmont said that he who thinks, feels and sees well, writes well. Therefore I should urge that this book be considered not as a body of opinion and statement to be accepted or rejected, but partly as a work of art to be enjoyed, partly as an invitation to think, feel and see for oneself.

The development of Gourmont's talent and the various influences which helped him to develop must at least be glanced at in an Introduction, though the subject is so complicated and vast that I approach it with considerable

diffidence. Let us imagine our young man newly arrived in Paris in 1883. He comes from a Catholic aristocratic family; he has been well educated, but has followed his own whim rather than prescribed courses, and we shall note that his culture is Franco-Latin, and not Greek. He is not exactly a "manière de mécréant", a sort of sinner, as M. Rouveyre gaily calls him, but along with great intellectual curiosity and a passion for books, he possesses a delicate sensibility, strong sensuality and extreme independence. He is shy and solitary, but animated with literary ambitions and the irresistible itch to write. Without any friends among the active literary groups, he not unnaturally drifts at first into works of learned compilation, made easier for him by his position in a great public library. The dominant literary school in France is that of the Naturalistes, the *Soirées de Médun* group, headed by Zola. Apart from them, are the real "masters", Flaubert and the Goncourts. The Naturalistes represent a sort of narrow positivism in literature. From fastidiousness, from individualist self-assertion, from a vein of romanticism, Gourmont utterly rejects this school, and goes his own obscure way. This we might call the first phase.

Among the Naturalistes was one original author who gradually became estranged from their principles and eventually converted himself into a Roman Catholic. This was Huysmans. In *A Rebours* he drew a fantastic picture of an artistic decadent who withdrew from life and, among other things, amused himself by reading the Latin

authors of the middle ages. About the time of its publication there also appeared a small periodical, called *Vogue*[1], edited by Stephane Mallarmé, and containing work by the "idealists" who refused to follow the Zola "realists". Mallarmé, Verlaine, Villiers, were all praised in *A Rebours*. This book exercised a considerable influence on Gourmont. He plunged with zest into the study of mediaeval Latin (with which he was already acquainted) and eventually produced the commentated anthology, *Le Latin Mystique*. He chose Mallarmé, Villiers, Verlaine and Huysmans as his literary admirations, and especially sought—and found—the companionship of Huysmans. Gourmont's early novels (notably *Sixtine*) and early prose style were influenced by Huysmans. On the other hand this Catholicism and Satanism were a mere form of idealistic decoration for Gourmont; he attempted to use Christian symbolism for purely artistic purposes as the Renaissance used pagan mythology. Huysmans, to Gourmont's great surprise, took the supernatural decoration seriously. If Huysmans influenced Gourmont, it is also true that Gourmont unwittingly had a great influence on Huysmans. In my view *La-Bas* was built on their friendship; Durtal is Huysmans, Des Hermies is Gourmont, and possibly Mme. de Chantelouve is Mme. de Courrière. I have given much of Gourmont's essay on his personal relations with Huysmans, which shows amusingly how Gourmont unwittingly decided the older man's conversion.

[1]No connection with the contemporary *Vogue*.

Then came the founding of the *Mercure de France,* which gave Gourmont a firm platform for the exposition of his views and a means for publishing anything he chose to write. (Most of his early works published in book form appeared in very small limited editions.) The influence of Mallarmé shows itself strongly in his artistic work, and philosophically he was dominated by Schopenhauer. For several years he produced "Symboliste" work (the various pieces in *Le Pélerin du Silence, Lilith, Théodat, Histoires Magiques;* the *Chevaux de Diomède* is already a slight departure) and made himself the critical defender of the Symbolistes (the two *Livres des Masques, Idéalisme*). This period was fertile and produced some valuable work, but Gourmont demonstrated his intense individualism by evolving out of Symbolisme into something peculiar to himself. The writing of *Epilogues* had brought him into touch with contemporary life, at least as revealed through the newspapers. His serious reading became really extensive, and enabled him to correct many of the hasty, erroneous and biased judgments of his earlier critical career. I consider that Nietzsche was a tremendous influence, a real liberation to Gourmont. This can scarcely be exaggerated, and I think (as I have said in an earlier essay) that Gourmont's "dissociation of ideas" is really an adaptation of Nietzsche's "transvaluation of values".

The *Chemin de Velours* still keeps touch with Gourmont's earlier studies in Christian literature and is a sort of bridge between his earlier and later manner of thought.

He gave much attention to technical problems of style and grammar *(Problème du Style, Esthétique de la Langue Française)* and began to give serious attention to biology *(Physique de l'Amour)*. Meanwhile he had abandoned the exclusive literary taste of the Huysmans-Mallarmé period, and as the various *Promenades Littéraires* and *Promenades Philosophiques* show, was deeply interested in classic French literature and in contemporary science and philosophy. During this period (1900-1910) Gourmont was in full maturity and produced much of his best work. His excursions into classical Latin poetry (Ovid, Lucretius) and a somewhat fanciful passion for Epicurus produced the admirable *Nuit au Luxembourg*. Voltaire, whom he had scoffed at in the 'nineties, now appears as a constant inspiration, in the *Epilogues* and *Dialogues,* and in the *Luxembourg*. Gourmont's interest in natural history is clearly showed in *Un Coeur Virginal* and in many passages of his occasional writing. The field of his purely literary operations was immense. While he was not strong in Greek, he had an unusually wide knowledge of Latin literature, particularly in the later periods; he touched and drew sustenance from the literatures of England, America, Germany, Italy and Spain. He wrote a long essay on Dante and Beatrice, translated a Spanish work of the 16th century, modernized mediaeval French texts. But, his most important work as a purely literary critic was, naturally, in French literature. His discovery of the unexpurgated MS of Cyrano de Bergerac's *Voyage to the Moon* would alone have made the

academic fortune of a professor. But we find traces of him everywhere, inspiring reprints, and provoking revivals with exquisite good taste. How much does the *Mercure* series, *Collection des plus belles pages,* owe to Gourmont? In any case, the revivals of Théophile, Rivarol, Chamfort, Restif, Laclos and many others owe much or something to Remy de Gourmont. His literary essays form a considerable portion of his baggage; they do not make the same mass effect as Sainte-Beuve's *Lundis,* but they are both more intelligent and more individual, and extend over a wider period. As a corrective and supplement to Sainte-Beuve, Remy de Gourmont's literary essays are deserving of the most serious consideration by all students of French literature. He is particularly valuable on the Symboliste period and its predecessors (Flaubert, the Goncourts, Huysmans, Villiers, Mallarmé, Verlaine), on the Romantics (especially Chateaubriand), but interesting also on the 18th century, on the 17th century non-classic poets, on the great prose-writers (Montaigne, Rabelais) of the 16th century; and he has left notes on mediaeval French authors. His great value as a literary critic lies in this: that he was himself a creative artist and wrote with a view to creative activity; that he had given great attention to problems of language, meaning, philology, grammar; that he criticised his contemporaries with his knowledge of past literature, and interpreted past literature with a complete understanding of modern literary interests and problems. Consequently his literary criticism is neither the hap-hazard

dogmatising of the ill-informed amateur nor the sterile, unrelated labour of the mere researcher and scholar, ignorant of contemporary literature and generally destitute of literary gifts.

After 1910 there appears a distinct slackening of production, followed by the unexpected renaissance due to Miss Barney's influence. The *Letters to the Amazon* are undoubtedly the finest work he produced in his last period.

The turn given to Gourmont by his "dissociation of ideas" and studies in language and meaning is particularly important. He analysed the meaning of words and showed how endless confusion arises from the almost universal looseness of usage. Yet, the artist in him prevented his falling into any pedantic and necessarily hopeless scheme for the reform of speech and the scientific fixing of meaning. He saw that the source of language is the speech of the people and that a writer must adapt the general speech to his special purpose, or remain for ever a mandarin inaccessible except to the few and doomed to speedy oblivion.

Remy de Gourmont, then, while unfitted for action to an extent almost humorous if it were not pathetic, possessed one of the acutest and freest minds of his own—I might almost add, any—age. His was a great literary career, whose sole reward was itself. He received no public honours, died poor, and, comparatively speaking, little read. Since his death his books have rapidly achieved a wide circulation which continually increases. Those who knew and valued him in his life-time cherish his memory with

pride and affection, and feel a personal interest in the diffusion of his name and works.

RICHARD ALDINGTON

SIXTINE

1890

AS soon as he was in the street Hubert saw glittering in the shadows the burning gaze of an invisible spectre, two terrible eyes, urging and imperious. He recognised them and a feeling of oppression crushed him; they were the two eyes of Lust.

"For women the wandering phantom is called Sin, is a male; for men, it is the female Lust. Ah! Yes, I recognise her. She was a companion of my youth. She is ingenious: Of old she scraped ballads to the moon on my adolescent nerves. To-day she drums on my neck the rondo of Lupanars. At a single blow she would prostitute the lover and love; I shall go to vile caresses and she whom I love will be the operator."

He realised it; a voluptuous dream had been brought on in his earliest adolescence by contemplating the eyes of the Madonna; since that time the association had been constant and very often inexorable: he either had to obey or to suf-

fer complete insomnia made yet more painful by the special excitement of the bed, or as a noctambule to pursue a flying prey. In this last case, the words of invitation at street corners little by little melted desire in the slow flame of disgust. But what a terrible night, when the slackened legs gave way, when the shame of this obscene vagabondage bowed his back under a full load of horror!

Yet he would not be like an obsessed burgess or a workman on pay-days, and knock at the barred door of some low house, drag down his idealism on spermy divans and auction his flesh with the least briny skins! He hesitated between a neighbouring and fairly clean harem and the appearances of calmative intrigue. He did not object to a mutual choice which seemed free, the excuse of a precise desire for one rather than another, public preliminaries washed of all shame by the complicity of the surroundings —Bullier, for example, or the Folies-Bergère. By taking a rapid decision and a cab he could reach one of these slave-markets before they closed. On reflection, he put Bullier aside; the hacks of that repeated performance were resting. As to the other exhibition, it was a long way off.

In his indecision he grew calmer. For a moment he hoped he would escape cheaply, but the eyes sprang up again, implacable eyes, obscene stars which would only halt and vanish over the chosen house.

It was in a little street by the Saint-Sulpice market.

There, lived a woman, whose eyes, sufficient for his early dreams, had seduced him in the past, in the past, about his

twentieth year, when no reasoned disgust bridles the senses. Every time his carnal obsessions converged on this agreeable memory and with an animal obstinacy every time he thought he would find the same woman and the same pleasures. As she did not yield to the first seeker, for she had the coquetry of a certain amorous cleanliness, she might often be surprised alone or, under the pretence of a jealous protector, she was capable of turning out the guest of the night if the newcomer pleased her more.

"And so," said Entragues to himself, "this is the end of it! Virtuous women know perfectly well what promiscuity their refusals lead to; they ought to yield at least from dignity. They ought to be shown this; it would be one of the useful chapters in the course of love which old practitioners would profess so well and with so much joy! But if they yielded, farewell the pleasure of duels of vanity!"

Without realising how useless and misplaced his reflections were, he followed the star.

"Come now, what will happen? Oh! I know beforehand. Never mind, I shall go on!"

He knocked in the arranged way.

"To think that I should remember that. Yet I have not come for a long time. For years I have been spared these sudden and irremissible tortures. For years! She will be changed, older, ugly. So much the better, it will be the necessary plunge and perhaps in half an hour I shall laugh at myself instead of weeping over it. Suppose she is away, or asleep, or engaged? Engaged! I should like to run

away like a school-boy before the door opens. One, two. . . . I shall go."

No, he knocked a second time.

"Who is it?"

" . . . . . ."

"You!"

"She is intimate, it is startling."

" . . . . . ."

"Always for you!"

"Again! she still likes me. It is less virile than indifference."

He heard whispering which came to him broken by the opening and shutting of doors. He had a sensation of the talk of nuns heard through a partition of solid wood. There were convent mysteries about this dubious place; the approach of women and their movements always give a man similar impressions, however different the surroundings may be. She was parleying. At last the bolt sounded, the key turned; another wait, but much shorter, in a dark anteroom; the sound of a second street door, steps descending the stairway. He had gone.

She was dressed, with her hat and gloves on.

"At least she has not just come from anybody's arms."

She had not grown older; hers was a full summer, flowering warmly, not faded by the breezes of mutual "happy moments." Women can endure anything; they are not harmed by late nights, by fastings or by many contacts; on the contrary, for them to flower, the gardener's incessant

watering-pot is necessary. She formulated joy in little exclamations and rather incoherent remarks; Entragues thought that it was just as well to pluck the present hour and forced himself to an amiable libertinism.

She thought him handsome and made for every sort of kisses; he let her talk, rather pleased at giving this impression and conscious that he was bestowing a moment of sincere pleasure on this woman, who was superior to others of her kind.

"After all," he thought, "these creatures are no more repulsive than adulterous women; it is true they lack the halo of lies but they are no more or less promiscuous; what is the difference between having two or ten men at the same time? Beyond one, vice begins and if we feel contemptuous for the first sort of women the same contempt is due the others. No doubt as they transgress a stricter law and a special vow, adulterous women must amuse themselves more infernally; the spice of hell grinds under their teeth and heats their kisses with anticipated fire if they have had the grace of a Christian education, but how many are capable of so pungent a pleasure as enjoying at the moment of love the inevitable damnation overcome for the pleasure of him they love? We must recognise another possible superiority. That is when there are children; the progeny of loose women have no father; adulterous progeny have two, a wise precaution against orphanhood."

Meanwhile Valentine brought some cakes and a bottle of that wine of Aumale which gives the people the illusion

of a princely feast. Then she sat nonchalantly at Entragues's knees, her eyes filled with blandishments, promises and allurements.

She watched him moisten his lips in the glass, wished to drink after him, seemed intoxicated with desire, abandoned to an hour of real love, consoling herself during one evening with this unexpected pilgrim for several months, several years perhaps, of pleasures foreseen and without respite, given without pleasure. A blasphemous comparison might have made him take her for a Magdalene suddenly moved with adoration, a soul newly abandoned to a revealed God, charming with her inner and useless supplications, so convinced that she was loving above her that a gesture of agreement overturned her with joy.

This very surprising spectacle calmed Entragues, but he felt his fault aggravated by all the preventive charm in which the flesh delights. It was no longer the unique shock necessary for the re-establishment of nervous circulation but a complex pleasure too prolonged to be excusable.

She kissed his hand prettily, the last shades of remorse disappeared, the two isochronous balance-wheels beat.

They talked of trifles and he, seeking the nothings which please such women, made her laugh. At moments she seemed surprised at her pleasure, as if the cold air about her had suddenly and magically evaporated in effervescent perfumes.

Entragues, though weary and ravaged, seemed handsome to her; light-haired with a finer ashiness at the temples,

the beard embrowning the cheeks and ending in two long points as in old Venetian portraits; the forehead high, the skin very pale with a slight rose flush in moments of animation, a straight nose, a heavy mouth, nearly black lashes and eyebrows over-lining eyes which were golden like feline eyes; yet gentle. His figure was ordinary and his muscles reasonable; he carried his head erect, seeming to watch invisible enchantments, his gaze divergent and fixed, like Unconsciousness.

Valentine watched his lips especially; he noticed it and gave them, not without biting the ripe pimentos which offered him their unfaded red. She was neither dyed nor painted, and of a verifiable veracity from head to foot; she proved it by beginning to undress. She, so frigid in her usual encounters, could not refrain, and her knowledge of men suggested to her that the sight of her beautiful dark skin, firm and shagreened, would incite touch, and touch would incite the rest. It was a reasonable supposition, for if some men like to conquer the ground foot by foot over knots and hooks, he appeared (this was false) gifted with the calm which awaits the opportunity and does not trouble with preliminaries. As to the delicacies, she had lost the use of them, and this phase of love did not make her rediscover lost treasures.

She stood up naked allowing herself to be seen with pride; her dignity was there, in the solidity of the lines, the firmness of her marble breasts, the fine condition of her flanks and the other curves.

Entragues looked at her with pleasure but with scarcely any disturbance, for the nude, especially in a courtezan's room, is not particularly sensual; it is so natural a state, so simple, so free from provocation, so little suggestive through its absence of mystery that the glimpse of a leg in the street, an adroitly dressed bust, the touch of a skirt, an ungloved hand, a smile behind a fan, a look, a gesture, a glance, even if with all chastity of intention, are much more exciting. The remark is banal, but Entragues was excusable for dwelling on it as an impression directly experienced, and was still trying to discover the cause.

In front of this very agreeable woman who was smoothing herself as she waited for him he felt—a great discouragement: "This beauty which pleases me, which I desire and which is mine, I shall not have. I shall take her in my arms, I shall hold her against my flesh, I shall penetrate into her as much as nature has permitted, and I shall not have her. If I should kiss her with as many kisses as lying has tongues, if I should bite her, if I should tear her in pieces, if I should eat her, if I should drink all her blood as a human sacrifice, still I should not have her. And every kind of possession I can dream of is vain; even if like a wave in a complete circumvolution I could impregnate her with my life at every point of her body at once, still I should not have her. Love's endosmosis is unreal, and only the deception of desire makes me believe in its possible accomplishment. I know it is a lie, I know the disappointment which awaits me, I shall be punished by

Je n'aime plus ...

—

Je n'aime plus les fleurs, elles meurent trop vite.
Depuis que leur cœur s'entr'ouvre et nous invite
A les aimer,
Qu'on les sent résignées, inévitablement vite,
A se fermer.

Je n'aime plus les femmes, leurs sourires sont trop fous.
Depuis si nos cœurs ont palpité pour vous,
Vains maîtresses,
Vos lèvres se détournent et vos mains sont des honte
A nos tendresses.

N. S.

a dreadful disappointment for having sought forgetfulness of myself outside myself, for having betrayed ideality, and yet it has to be, since the senses are imperative and I have not deserved the supernatural gift of grace."

The contacts were effected as it is written in the flesh of man, but Entragues felt a swifter disillusion than he had wished.

The adorably seductive woman yielded under his kisses; the carnal dream breathed into the lovers unconsciousness of good and evil; eagerly and wildly they went, ready to set foot in the boat which sets out for the island of Delights, seeking how the sail should be turned and the rudder inclined. Suddenly Entragues sprang up pale; spectral between the curtains of the window, terrible in her red dress, Sixtine suddenly appeared.

"Ah!" he thought, vaguely terrified but with regained control, "This is the reality. The illusions are mowed down, the hay is carried, the meadow is bare. This had to happen; the images we evoke voluntarily and deliberately in the end acquire bad habits and evoke themselves; this one has chosen its time badly; it will have to be present at a disagreeable spectacle. So much the worse for it, I did not invite it."

Valentine questioned him anxiously: "Sudden dizziness? What a pity!"

The bed-curtains had to be closed and the light extinguished. Sixtine was kind enough not to move and repudiated the stratagem of phosphorescence.

When the candles were re-lighted after a certain time they only illuminated an empty room for Entragues. Sixtine had gone. But desire had gone also and all the confessed enjoyment of a pleasant night of debauchery.

He dared not go away, fearing a solitude peopled against his will; to weary the beast is to weary the intelligence; he exhausted himself as people take laudanum.

Solange was a practical pessimist.[1] He laboured perseveringly to make his life unpleasant by all sorts of very simple but ingenious devices.

First of all his principles: men lie and women deceive. There are only two motives for human actions, lucre and lust. All women of agreeable aspect hide some redhibitory blemish. Men who are not malicious are stupid. Et cetera.

Further principles: All food is spoiled or adulterated; it is quite useless to seek anything better than the bad. All streets are hideous, filled with disgusting courtezans, rubbish, open sewers and filth. All apartments lack air and light, et cetera.

Consequently, since he took his principles seriously, Gaetan Solange lived in a muddy district, at the end of a damp courtyard in two or three dark little rooms; it was the most suitable place he could find after years of patient search.

When he returned home at night, it was in the midst of the repulsive assaults of an army of low prostitutes,

[1]This is probably a portrait of J. K. Huysmans.

and sometimes a wandering drunkard obstructed the narrow lane with curses and threats: Solange was pleased, for this proved that the police were inefficient, that no one could return home after ten o'clock without risking his life.

A spongey cutlet, a woody cigar, sour beer, a soiled table cloth, caused him visible satisfaction. Things were thus: "What do you expect, if we want to live we must accept life's discomforts."

It was agreeable to him to be robbed by a woman who when his pockets were empty became refractory to every caress, and the friends who had abused his carefully misplaced confidence were as dear to him as spelling mistakes to a schoolmaster: It proved once more the absolute rules of his grammar.

He read nothing but the newspapers and the most abject of all, in order that nothing should trouble his belief that no one writes except to make money and that the viler and more lying a literature is the more it delights the public, the whole public.

To ornament truth is to respect it.

If we were quite certain that there is nothing outside ourselves, how quickly we should be cured of our vanity and how soon our pleasures would be freed from it.

If you are not a philosopher, why did you marry a pretty wife?

I maintain that women are neither beautiful nor ugly, and that all their charm irradiates from their sex; desire makes the sketch of beauty and love fills it in.

Everything written since the Bible can be summed up in three words; the totality of books, if consumed in a fantastic crucible, would give the chemical residue: *Cogito, ergo sum.*[1] Descartes is the one man who ever wrote a necessary word, and thirteen letters sufficed him.

The symbol is as imperishable as the idea, of which it is the transcendant form.

Nature! The artist creates Nature, and art is only the faculty of making objective in a simulacrum an individual representation of the world.

Entragues (i. e. Remy de Gourmont) loves nothing but art and is only interested in style.

Truth is what we believe when we no longer believe in anything.

Ah! were eternity granted to me! Indispensable eternity, without thee life is but a wretched passing.

Does the supreme surrender of a woman prove her love? No, it may be the opportunity, or boredom, or the neces-

[1] I think, therefore I am.

sity to lie, or vengeance, or perversity which throws her into your arms. To feel yourself beloved, you must believe; love is a religion.

"I think I am praying," said Entragues, raising his head, "and I am composing a literary work. That prayer was quite well done, and if I can remember it I shall make use of it. Take my note-book, write it down—that is blasphemy! Why not? One must profit by inspiration, for it does not come twice."

The inventor of popular suffrage appeared to him at that moment the most execrable monster produced by humanity, and compared with that unknown coward, Nero and Attila rolled into one were creatures worthy of a genuflection. . . . At the age of reason Entragues, filled with disgust, had entirely renounced his share of sovereignty and never had he soiled his aristocratic fingers with a voting-paper.

Why do thirty women you do not want throw themselves at your head, while the one woman you desire refuses to give you joy?

Men consider women as inferior men; and generally women look on men as being other women armed with a superior power.

Outside a strict religion, observed in its commandments,

the laws of society and the special rules of a group, there is no common moral consciousness: morality is a personal talent.

Will? Will what? Ah! how much more interesting it is to watch oneself think: What spectacle equals that of the human brain, that marvellous hive where ideal bees distil thoughts in their nest of cells—a fugitive activity, but one which at least gives an illusion of duration, ah! only an illusion, for nothing exists but the eternal.

A woman is never surprised that she is loved; it is the contrary which surprises her.

Pliny, also, believed in science, and Paracelsus, and Erasmus and Salmasius, and where is their science, O Villon?—there where your verses, you idle student, will never go!

People only talk of what they do not know; to talk about what you know seems useless; you are bored and bore others. That is the reason why criticism is so often displeasing when it is well-informed.

(Drinking absinthe)

Intoxication is a very noble passion and I should like to acquire it. Intoxication—one should say drunkenness, but philanthropists have dragged the word in the humani-

tarian mud of their anglican dissertations. . . . Why scorn intoxication? It is the most intellectual of passions; it is not depressing, like gambling; it is not weakening, like sex. . . . To reach intoxication with one glass of liquid—is not that the ideal?

The object of an intellectual life is not to lie with the princess of Trebizond, but to explain oneself in one's motives for action by facts or gestures.

May my flesh be sterile and my mind fertile!

At a dance has a woman anything better to do than to allow herself to be looked at?

LETTERS TO SIXTINE

[LETTRES A SIXTINE]

Written 1887, Published 1921

The Letters to Sixtine *were written before the novel,* Sixtine, *to Madame de Courrière, the inspirer of Gourmont's passion and book. The* Letters to Sixtine *include poems and fragmentary notes as well as the letters to Madame de Courrière. It should be interesting to compare these indications of a real passion with Gourmont's dramatization of the experience of* Sixtine.

Note Written the 14th April, 1887

AMONG those minutes of profound and ineffable joy, the first caress returned, the first abandonment, the first clasp, soft and crucifying emotions of desire; among such minutes that to have felt them is to have lived and felt passion; among those minutes whose superhuman charm it is vain to attempt to render, the most penetrating in the memory is that when I felt her warm hand rest on my forehead which had grown pale with desire. . . .

Words are weak and bend under the weight. Nothing like this was ever expressed by any poet.

And she who made me feel this—who without giving herself was mine from desire—she is the unforgettable, will always be beloved—Everything which made up the vague interest of life disappears—and one point remains: She.

It seems as if everything could be endured in patience, so long as she comes.

Everything may disappear so long as she remains. . . .

All writing is banal—Passion is written in blood, in flesh—and what a god is in a man when he loves thus!

Saturday, 21st of May, 11 o'clock in the Evening.

I find this note in a note-book:

"Saturday, 2nd April,

"Decisive day. Passion sweeps her away. Analysis, reasoning, et cetera, finis. Happy moment. Why only today, since I have loved her for weeks!"

And now in a most delicious reverie I remember the beginnings and the first hesitations of this passion which has occupied my life.

First of all, it was nothing. I met her without any emotion. Then I thought of conversations with her, and there was never an opportunity. No idea of pleasing her; only something pleasant when I found her.

I lost sight of her. She was somewhere in the South. One day Madame V. . . told me that in writing to her she had mentioned me. I was more flattered than moved. Then I thought of pleasing her intellectually. I even be-

gan sometimes to feel interested in her. The news that she was returning was a pleasure to me. She arrived, sat down restlessly, threw me her muff as a privilege, dazzled me; I felt some emotion. The muff was a small part of her which I held and touched; nervous agitation.

One night she went out with R. . . Feeling of jealousy. A curious past history which left me cold; I was only concerned about it later.

Once I saw her home. Nothing. I went to call on her. Dazzlement. I felt her coquettish wish to please me and replied to it. Something happened.

Our Saturdays became precious to me. I thought of them all the week.

Two months passed. Music. Conversations. I thought of nothing but the pleasure of the moment.

It must have been towards the end of February. I felt perplexed. Should I experience anything but the pleasures of sympathy? I watched myself. I must have seemed extremely cold. I exaggerated my reserve, I talked in so detached a way that it would have frozen any slight desire. I lied to myself.

After the last surprise I allowed myself to drift into verses. They were ill-received; irony had been opposed to me. I thought her absolutely indocile even to a fantasy.

Obstinately set upon this, I observed myself ill, I thought myself more insensible than she. Certainly I felt nothing.

Then, suddenly, one evening I saw it all plainly. She played Beethoven to me; and I clutched my armchair in

order not to seize her and kiss her full on the mouth. I suffered, but nothing appeared.

It was over, I loved her but should I ever say it? I decided not to, convinced that she would receive me coldly with that irony which freezes me.

One evening as I was leaving her, her hand remained in mine. A step had been made, I should go on to the end.

I found the copy of Vigny. Several pleasant hours listening to her as she read me the verses. Her voice had no emotion and I doubted. Perhaps it had been only a momentary abandonment.

I spoke, one word. I was not repulsed.

The next day our heads touched. I thought only of a kiss before leaving. The book fell. She was in my arms. It was a sensation of such happiness that I could have fainted. She loves me.

Monday morning, 6th June, 1887

I awoke and regained consciousness of myself this morning, my dear heart, in an extremely pleasant joy. You are skilful in the art of compensation and yesterday's were divine hours though sometimes torturing and still incomplete. But the supreme abandonment was in your desire and in your will; so, in spite of momentary obstacles, you are mine for ever. It was not from abnegation, but the free passion which ceaselessly rejoined our lips surrendered on yours your soul and your life; and in exchange did you

not drink on mine to the last drop all my life poured out for you?

Such moments, softened still more by distance, in the memory, by the appeasement of the flesh, would suffice to wipe out from life past pain and future bitterness. If we had nothing else, my dear, our share would yet be good and privileged. How well you have tamed my male pride by making me accept gladly my abdication of the rights given me by your tenderness. Have I not put myself in your hands, saying that you shall decide the hour, that I will take nothing save from your absolute liberty? At that and that alone I must aim; I must put aside everything which, on my side separates us as you must do, since we have but one object and we cannot allow vile obstacles to hinder our happiness and our definitive union.

To me it will be an immense joy to feel your life bound to my life by the strong link of our wills, to be able to call you "she who shall never be separated from me,—*questa, che mai da me non fia divisa.*"

Sunday, 21st August, 1887, 8:30-9

It seems to me, my adored darling, that I have loved you and that I love you to-day more than ever. It is as if a new flower had bloomed, giving a new tint and a new perfume; I cannot express it.

Pain is eloquent, excess of happiness is also eloquent, that is to say it must expend itself without, in phrases—and I am among those who write better than they talk.

Feeling you so charming, so tender, so *given* to me, I experienced a new sensation, a plenitude of love. At other times perhaps you have been so, yes, you have been, but I did not feel it in the same way; we had not yet responded to each other so profoundly.

True sentiment and sensation grow keener with repetition instead of being dulled; we penetrate each other more intimately; we understand everything better, the slightest gesture, glances, movements of the lips where the soul expands in flowering kisses. Each time is a completer mutual taking possession, and you are hard to conquer; in you, perhaps in me too, there are disconcerting moments when our two prides meet face to face.

But in the depth of our souls how we love each other, and what a joy to think and re-think it!

I am happy through you, my dear heart, and I never was before. You make me live as I never thought I could live, with an energy of sensation I never felt before.

How you are all my life, how you hold me everywhere, how you envelope me with yourself!

There are more things in heaven and earth than in all philosophy, as Hamlet says; there are more joys in your kisses, in your smiles, in your words, in your embraces, more joys than the wildest of dreams that are promised.

I love you, I love you, I love you. And if I wrote that all night I should still not have said how much I love you.

Friday, 16th September, 1887, 7:30

I returned—you were at home—you heard me, you did not open the door.

What reply can I make to that and your last letters? What?

I am mortally sad, I went away not knowing where.

You will drive me mad or kill me.

There is some mystery. At one o'clock then. It will be very hard for me to live until then. Jest, for fear of moving her.

Who could have told me that after the pain of parting there would be the anguish—ah! worse—of returning?

SHORTER EXTRACTS

Can anything be worse than to cause even a slight annoyance to a woman one loves so intimately that the slightest of her sufferings re-acts a hundred-fold on oneself?

After all, it is an extreme pleasure to be sincere, even if one is incoherent.

It is true, I do not possess the independence which would be precious to me, one cannot change in an instant the conditions of a life which was not reserved for Her who has come to me, since She was not expected, since I avoided her. I only meant to carry out my task, to make use gradually of my talent, with no other object but a distant and delusive satisfaction. Practical I have not been, I

was unable to divide my life into two parts, one for the nothingness which was its basis, the other for the "perhaps" which should have been its hope. I feel the bitterness of my lack of foresight, but why must you feel it too?

To approach the future with you would seem to me an ascent towards an even greater happiness; I have never penetrated a little further into you without loving you more, or, if it is not possible for me to love you more, without finding at each new step new reasons for being attached to you. No, the present does not suffice me. The present passes and the future remains.

After twenty-four hours of absence from you I seem to be far, far away, in another land, in another world, and I only find myself by pouring myself out to you.

At one end passion touches the extreme wisdom, which is to wish to be happy; at the other the extreme folly, which is to wish to be damned with the person one loves.

It is as if I were in love with Botticelli's Madonna and wanted to carry her off. Desire, painful at first, then gentle when hope comes, is exacerbated to torture when the impossible rises up before it.

I am working and suddenly, for no reason, her image comes before my eyes—and like one whose will is domi-

nated by an overmastering idea, I feel myself saying with my lips: God, how I love that woman.

You belong wholly to me, and I too am yours without any restriction. And without this absolute abandonment, without this mutual gift, we should only have lived uneasy, incomplete, tortured by that sensation of desire never satisfied. And perhaps it will be a good thing that we waited; it gives an even rarer value to your abandonment.

We only love once, but as there are apprenticeships of thoughts, so there are apprenticeships of sentiment. To feel and to think profoundly requires a strength of heart or a strength of mind which can only be acquired by one who has lived.

You have given me joy, I owe you everything; it seems to me that I exist through you and that without you I should not want to live. It is indeed a New Life, the *Vita Nuova,* which began with your love. I can write at that date, like Dante: Here begins the new life.

What can we not do together? Although we have a thousand points in common, we have different gifts which complete and fit into each other. It would indeed have been a pity if we had not met.

If passion reasoned, it would no longer be passion.

You alone have been able to unseal my lips, and even you can see that though I gladly write everything I think, I speak with difficulty. The first word is hard for me; some exterior impulse is necessary; the will is not enough.

MAGIC TALES

[HISTOIRES MAGIQUES]

1894

The Woman Who Must Not Be Mourned

HE was mourning the woman who must not be mourned, the woman who cannot be acknowledged, the dead woman whose name and memory belong to another. He alone perhaps was suffering, and he was forced to smile, to listen to anecdotes, to tell them himself, and to spare neither suggestions nor insinuations nor perfidies, for he wished to keep his secret.

He was weeping, but the tears ran into his throat and not down his cheeks and, like one of Dante's damned souls, he swallowed an inexhaustible and poisoned stream of grief. Once or twice, trying to make a delicate and discreet grimace of surprise, he felt his face contract, his throat swell, and it needed all the superhuman strength of love to prevent his breaking into sobs and disturbing a decent ceremony with scandal and ridicule.

They followed the body along a little path bordered with firs, of decent sadness, of moderate grief, and as they approached the cemetery the conversations calmed down, fell like the sounds of a forest before the storm, like the murmurs of a flock at the gate of the slaughter-house. Little by little their uneasiness imposed silence upon them, and the crowd entered the town of the dead with the fear of not leaving it.

Meanwhile he carried out his pretext at indifference with anguish, and pretended to read carefully the vain inscriptions imposed upon the insensibility of marbles. The hopes engraved there revolted him by their candour or their hypocrisy. . . . The eternal survival of souls moved in him no leaven of desire; he did not believe in it and did not want to.

When all the formalities had been endured, and while the crowd moved away liberated and happy with long strides, he presented himself from good manners and also from friendship, before the husband, the old Marquis de V. . ., in order to clasp his hand and utter a few pitying banalities.

"I was awaiting you, my friend," said Monsieur de V. . . "Will you give me your arm and lead me home. Come, I beg you, save me from these intruders."

Making a sign of farewell, Monsieur de V. . . went away with the companion he had chosen to share his grief and his confidence.

"Come, and support me carefully," the old Marquis

went on, "I am broken, it seems as if I were a hundred years old! All the strength and life that were left me are nailed in a coffin; do you realize that I have buried her, whereas it is she who, like a respectful daughter, should have closed my eyes and have consoled my chilly forehead with a supreme kiss? Ah! my friend! you are left to me, you at least! You will not abandon me, will you? You cannot. I know you cannot, for I am the only person to whom you can speak of her, the only one near whom you can weep—for I know everything that has happened, but I wished it to happen, and, listen to me carefully, my wife's adultery was the redemption of my marriage.

"When I married her six years ago I was already nothing but the shadow of a man and I knew I was perfectly impotent to give her the expected pleasures. I was condemning her to a sort of hideous and humiliating widowhood—huimiliating, because in her ignorance she might have thought herself scorned; hideous, because though I had renounced possession of the virgin who was abandoned to me, I had not renounced libertinage and the amusements which an old man can derive from a docile and innocent creature. But, when I was married and on the very threshold of the nuptial room, I was ashamed of the baseness of my desires. I entered, and my whole pleasure was to caress for an instant her beautiful soft gold hair, and 'to tuck up' my wife's bed, as mothers do to their little girl's. No doubt she was greatly surprised, especially later on when she knew the secret I could not show her. She

received the explanation from you, and I could tell you the day and perhaps the hour, if you had forgotten them! Do you remember the tenderness of my greeting *that day* and your embarrassment and your lies and your blushes? Children, children! Confess, you were afraid, and confess also that at the same time you felt delicious joy!

"So little was I deceived, my dear friend, that I myself arranged your meetings, taking great care to warn you beforehand of my absences and my returns. Often, to maintain your love and your desire, I thwarted the meetings you had planned, or else I remained a whole week without stirring from the house, exacting for some pretended indisposition the constant presence of the sad Antoinette. Ah! I was very paternal and you owe me a deal of gratitude. But for my ruses you would perhaps have quarreled at the end of three months and, but for my foresight, you would never have found that charming hunting-lodge at the end of the park, where everyone thought I rested in the afternoon and where I left you so undisturbed for so many beautiful summer nights!

"My duty was to give my wife the most elementary joys of life; incapable myself, I made it easy for one who seemed to me worthy of the part. You have filled it well. She loved you to her last minute, uttering your name in her last delirium.

"You both behaved with dignity. Your discretion was perfect, and I am sure the Marquise de V. . . died with the reputation of a faithful and heroic wife. Heroic, yes,

she always met me with a smiling face, gave in to my will and my old bachelor's whims; faithful, for only one man kissed her knees."

They reached Monsieur de V. . .'s house and went straight up to the Marquise's room.

"I was nothing more for her, I repeat," continued Monsieur de V. . ., "than an indulgent father. I have lost my daughter. You must mourn your wife.

"I know what the world would think of me, if this adventure were known; it would despise me. What you yourself are thinking, I do not ask. What does it matter to me! I have always considered myself a free man, free from prejudices and free from negative duties. There are some men who step up a rung by accepting the respect for social conventions; I should step down.

"Whatever may be the degree of conventional immorality which an honest fool would attribute to my conduct, I myself consider it to be of a very high and even absolute morality; and, proudly and with grief, I can embrace in my dead wife's room the man whom I myself made her lover.

"Weep, weep, my friend! Enjoy all the dreadful delights of grief! Weep for her whom you cannot weep for anywhere else.

"Look, here are her jewels, her lace, her shoes, her dresses! One of her dresses is missing—her wedding dress, the dress she wore on the day she gave herself to you; she is lying in it out there!"

THE PILGRIM OF SILENCE

[LE PELERIN DU SILENCE]

1892-96

From: The Pilgrim of Silence

IF you find disinterestedness in the garments of a man, prostrate yourself with your forehead in the dust. If in the garments of a woman, take that woman and return home.

From: The Phantom (Le Fantôme)

Her virginity knew the astonishment of having admitted into itself a completely unknown traveler. He had friendly ways of insinuating himself, an air of gentle impertinence, the specious and disconcertingly self-confident gestures of those who know their own strength, and measure exactly the consequence of a bold step. Hyacinthe asked herself how she could have formerly given expression to so many insanities and have listened to so many, relative to spiritual delirium. How clear everything became! Light flashed under her closed eyelids

and her intellect, freed from doubts, soared like a bird of dawn in an atmosphere of dazzling limpidity. She realized that all truths, even the most immemorial, converged towards a central point of her flesh and that, through an ineffable mystery, her mucous membranes hid in their dark folds all the riches of the infinite. During an almost century-long instant she was convinced that her own essence had absorbed and held for ever the essence of all things; it was a possession and a joy so immeasurable that she fainted: When she recovered she felt nothing but a great weariness and an unendurable affright at having been duped. Nevertheless she separated without rancour from her illusory traveller, and even felt a sort of friendship for him, as for a companion in great though fallacious adventures.

I, who loved her loftily, wished to operate in her a transposition to the minor key of my personal and wilful illusions, and was painfully impressed, for she had manifested nothing but surprise. Afterwards as before, she appeared the same, just as sad at living so little, but with a different sadness, where disillusion replaced ignorance.

I questioned her, but the sensation was already so distant and so confused that she replied with the frank sincerity agreed upon between the nobility of our minds:

"It is not very much better than eating a peach."

Since sexual pleasure, outside the organisms of brutes, is only the echo and redundance of pleasure given, my joy diminished almost to nothing, to an opportune refreshment

on a walk with the fruit which hangs above the wall—and I doubted the legitimacy of such a defloration.

Yet she admitted everything that was true; the memory of a flight towards the ether, but so vague! Later, through the repetition of identical sensations, her memory was fortified and she was able to confirm my guess.

"But," she added, "duration is needed, a forever. Brief or less brief, an instant is only an instant."

"And there is nothing but instants. Believe that we capture infinity in a kiss!"

"Then, more!"

From: The Strange Castle (Le Chateau Singulier)

"Yes, I am Vitalis, who formerly tried to live upon dreams. Ah! I have long abandoned that diet! When I left the illusory woman who could only feed me with her ravings, I met this woman and loved her seriously, as a man who knows the value of life. She was a shepherdess. When I first saw her she had just taken her flock of white lambs to the slaughter-house; I did as she had done; I slaughtered all my dreams and, since we had become like each other, we loved one another. To lift her up to me I made myself like her I loved and we were happy. I was rich; bit by bit my fortune disappeared; but I do not regret it; riches permit idleness; idleness permits dreaming, dreaming corrodes the muscles like unhealthy vapours; now I work, which is better than thinking."

"You are a slave!" said Elade, almost weeping.

"Slave, if you will," replied Vitalis. "No matter, I am content with my lot."

"Impossible," said Elade, "revolt!"

"I am an honest man," said Vitalis.

"Be free," said Elade.

The weaver shrugged his shoulders:

"Let me work—like a man."

Elade and Psallus left the weaver's house and Psallus said:

"There are two sorts of men, free men and the others. Let us leave the others."

"Let us leave the others," said Elade.

And they went out into the world to enjoy their liberty.

From: The Litany of the Rose
(Litanies de la Rose)

Hypocritical flower.

Flower of silence.

Copper-coloured rose, more fraudulent than our joys, copper-coloured rose, embalm us in your deceits, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Rose with the painted face like a whore, rose with the prostitute heart, rose with the painted face, pretend to be pitiful, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Rose with the puerile cheek, O virgin of future betrayals, rose with the puerile cheek, innocent and red, open the snares of your pure eyes, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Rose the colour of pure gold, O treasure-chest of the ideal, rose of the colour of pure gold, give us the key of your body, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Rose the colour of silver, censer of our dreams, rose the colour of silver, take our hearts and turn them to smoke, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Rose with the sapphic gaze, paler than the lilies, rose with the sapphic gaze, proffer us the perfume of your illusory virginity, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Rose with the forehead of yellow ivory, lover of yourself, rose with the forehead of yellow ivory, tell us the secret of your virginal nights, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Rose with the lips of blood, O eater of flesh, rose with the lips of blood, if you want our flesh what shall we do with it? Drink it, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Flesh-coloured rose, goddess of good will, flesh-coloured rose, make us kiss the sadness of your cool tasteless skin, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Voilet rose, O modesty of perverse little girls, violet rose, your eyes are larger than the rest, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Dawn-coloured rose, colour of the sky, colour of nothing, O smile of the sphynx, dawn-coloured rose, smile opening upon nothingness, we shall love you, for you deceive, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Fair rose, light cloak of chrome on frail shoulders, O

fair rose, female stronger than male, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Orange-coloured rose, O fabulous Venetian, O patrician, O Doge's wife, orange-coloured rose, the tiger's mouth sleeps under the damask of your foliage, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Cup-shaped rose, red vase where the teeth bite when the mouth comes to drink of you, cup-shaped rose, our bites make you smile and our kisses make you weep, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Crimson rose, O sumptuous autumn sunsets, O crimson rose, you lie down and offer yourself, an imperial offering, to the covetings of impuberty, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Marbled rose, rose and red, melting and ripe, marbled rose, gladly you show the reverse of your petals, in the strictest intimacy, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Incarnate rose, stupid rose full of health, incarnate rose, you drench us and snare us with a very red and very mild wine, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Rose with the virginal heart, O equivocal and rose adolescence which has not yet spoken, rose with the virginal heart, you have nothing to tell us, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Blue rose, iris-like rose, monster coloured like the Chimera's eyes, blue rose, lift your eyelids a little: are you afraid to be looked at, eye to eye, Chimera, hypocritical flower, flower of silence?

Green rose, sea-coloured rose, O navel of the sirens, green rose, wavering and fabulous rose, you are nothing but water as soon as a finger has touched you, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Vermilion-coloured rose, amorous shepherdess laid in the furrows, vermilion-coloured rose, the shepherd breathes you and the goat has browsed you, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Red and black rose, insolent and secret rose, red and black rose, your insolence and your red grew pale among the compromises invented by virtue, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Snowy rose, the colour of snow and swan's feathers, snowy rose, you know that snow is fragile and you open your snowy feathers only to the rarest, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Opal rose, O sultana sleeping in the scent of the harem, opal rose, languor of constant caresses, your heart knows the profound peace of satisfied vices, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Amethyst rose, morning star, episcopal tenderness, amethyst rose, you sleep on devout and downy bosoms, gem offered to Mary, O sacristine gem, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Cardinal rose, rose the colour of the blood of the Roman Church, cardinal rose, you make the great eyes of the *mignons* dream and more than one will pin you in the knot of his garter, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Papal rose, rose watered by the hands that bless the world, papal rose, your golden heart is of copper, and the tears empearled upon your vain corolla are the tears of Christ, hypocritical flower, flower of silence.

Hypocritical flower,
Flower of silence.

THE HORSES OF DIOMEDES

[LES CHEVAUX DE DIOMEDE]

1897

"EXPLANATION about Cyrene? I do not know the whole of her life and what I do know does not extremely captivate me; it is too close to the hand-book, too much of what inevitably happens. At this moment of civilization, every intelligent girl without principles might become a Cyrene, with slight differences. But she is the only one of her kind and she reigns."

Thus spoke Diomedes, and Pascase listened carefully.

Seated on the terrace of a café they were drinking violent alcohol and awaiting the hour when they should call upon that illustrious woman.

"We must excite ourselves a little, my friend, acquire the illusion that we are about to enter upon a pleasure. Let us take on this assurance. For my part, I have some private reasons for uneasiness. . . . No, let us consider

you and not me. To think of myself bores and depresses me. . . . Cyrene is still very beautiful."

Pascase would have liked to know her age. Diomedes did not know it.

"It is a very difficult thing. Women's ages? Do we know the age of horses? With crushed oats, clippers, care, rest, a good harness and polished hoofs, a horse is always young. Only the groom knows its age. Or the veterinary surgeon. You must ask Cyrene's age from her maid or her doctor. Let us say she is in her second youth. Delicious period for a celebrated woman, for men are so vain that fame gives her more beauty than the years have taken from her. Thus it is the golden age of actresses, the moment when their hearts are renewed and rejuvenated; puberties are stirred and crowd about the priestess; she gives good advice and proceeds to initiations; and with the authority of her name, of her experience and of her body steeped in essences, she domineers over a whole generation whose grandmother she might be."

Diomedes replied to an objection from Pascase:

"But, my friend, with well-endowed persons the body is only affected in extreme old age. Ninon and Goethe at eighty had preserved all their plastic harmony from chin to heel. . . . But here is a little of her history: A middle-class and sentimental girl, she married. No religion, no morals, an uncertain sense of behavior; she was dedicated to adultery. She fell into it, which surprised nobody, not even herself. On the contrary she was proud of it, as a

distinction, a conquered elegance which marked her out among her sisters. She was no longer a middle-class woman; she was the middle-class adulteress. Still a little silly, in spite of her intelligence, she felt vain of her comparatively common state, expanded and became prettier. The flattered little lover, who nevertheless despised her (for he was very silly and definitively so) taught her the whole gamut. She ran over the scales, learnt to enjoy her sex, to make use of all her mucous membranes. But she thought; her ambitious little heart beat and rang; she felt herself equal to the most celebrated in wit, in beauty, in sexual industry, and she was only the little mistress of a little clerk. A crisis decided by chance. She might have met the rich man about town, who offers a pair of horses; she met the man who writes in the papers; she will write. The man was old, powerful and depraved; he dictated, she wrote; he spoke, she obeyed. She understood the importance of being collaborator; she awaited the inheritance humbly and with docility. As she learned her new job she was the pay-office, for the newspaper belonged to the man; she paid by opening her corsage. The man died, she wept for him, she was famous. Since then, either in the newspapers she owns and edits, or in all the others, she has not ceased to write one single day of her life, even during her adventures and her caprices. In the society of today, since there is no other criterion, a writer is only judged by the abundance or the rarity of his copy; he who pauses at the end of the furrow to meditate is lost. No

longer do we plough with oxen; but with tractors. The typewriter will do great service to journalists; it will allow them to double their production without increasing their general expenses—the ideal of all healthy commerce. Cyrene, who is rich and pompous, employs short-hand typists; she has three who alternate and supply each other's place, for she dictates as she speaks, as an active and abundant woman speaks, without ever stopping or reflecting. An ordinary article only takes her twenty minutes; she talks off five or six every morning and she would go on again after lunch if the number of periodicals were sufficiently large to coincide with the fertility of her genius. But what is even more admirable is that in the vertiginously swift copy there is never a glimmering of wit or the phosphorescence of an idea. For a long time this perplexed me; at last, as Newton discovered the system of the world by seeing the fall of an apple, one day I understood Cyrene as I watched a stream flowing past."

"And to think that she is your friend!" cried Pascase.

"And will be yours. She is amiable, witty and obviously intelligent, but unable to communicate any of these gifts in her writing. I do not think she wilfully refrains from allowing her talent to appear; there would be moments of forgetfulness and absent-mindedness. Never; it is impeccably fluid and empty. Moreover talent, but style first of all, the primary condition of talent, is incompatible with her industry. Nothing wearies the mass of readers so much as style; a new metaphor disturbs or irritates a simple

and uncultivated mind; if he understands it, it gives him no pleasure, but he thinks the author pretentious and resents his having caught his eye and mind even for a second; if he does not understand, which is more common, he becomes angry. It is very just and very reasonable. In a few centuries everyone will think on this point as the ordinary man thinks today. There will be no literature, either in prose or verse, and thought will be expressed according to plain, dry, purely algebraic formulae. Since there will be no more general ideas every notion of extra-sensation being abolished or considered as one of the symptons of madness, it is very possible that our system of writing will be abolished as too slow. For men penned up by science and socialism in needs and pleasures foreseen and ordered once for all, a few ideograms will suffice to express all human thought, which will be brief; physical needs, sexual desires, good, bad, rain, sun, cold, hot. I estimate that with fifty graduated grunts and as many representative signs a herd of socialised men would be able to express their genius perfectly. Meanwhile and from today on, we must admit the perfect uselessness of literature and all arts; only children and the infirm play. Strong and ripe, humanity will no longer play at making verses, music or painting, any more than the woman of seventy plays with a doll or at *tour-prends-garde*. Ah! my dear Pascase, how happy we are to be children!"

"For my part," said Pascase, "I should not dislike a more serious and better-ordered humanity, with less of the

unforseen, less injustice. My dear friend, your skin itches where the yoke presses. Injustice is one of the results of the exercise of liberty. It is more than that; it is the work of nature and the work of God even. A fortune is an injustice, but beauty is another and a more serious one, an essential injustice, like intelligence, like all the gifts which render a man superior. Let us be unjust, my friend, let us suffer injustice, but us be free. A rather ingenious fable has been composed about this, perhaps you know it? . . . After all, what is injustice? Is it unjust that Cyrene earns the wages of two hundred working-women? I do not know and it is all the same to me. She is the joy of the people; she has given pleasure to many men; she ravishes youth by the magnificent amplitude of her charms. Her part is a good one. . . ."

"You were making fun of me, Diomedes, the day when you advised me to try to please this old sinner. . . ."

"Be more Parisian, Pascase. I still advise you to please her. A luxurious woman like Cyrene, is only as old as she is supposed to be. Suppose, doubt, dream. Why should her harmoniously developed corporal frame not still be pure? How do you know! Try!"

"Cynicism," said Pascase.

"Yes, cynicism. Love only comprehends two terms: chastity and cynicism. Everything in between is composed of meanness, morality, hypocrisy. Love is bestial or divine."

"Diomedes, you exalt yourself to a paradox, which is

your way of leaning over the absurd, and intoxicating yourself with marshy vapours. . . . But tell me; Cyrene has passed through every sort of occupation?"

"All the occupations of women. None of them is dishonourable. Delicious eels dwell in the mud, for a season, a summer. . . ."

"They retain the taste. . . ."

"So little that it is a spice. Moreover there is nothing mysterious about these occupations. They can easily be reduced to one—prostitution. Do not tremble, my friend; it is the common occupation of all men and all women. It is the occupation of our body and of our soul; and all our senses merely enjoy the universal prostitution of men, animals, things and God. Women especially are so well made for it; either the monastic cell or the world. Have you never desired to undress the nun who passes with lowered eyes, and when she was undressed to make a girdle of her heavy rosaries and to enjoy that sacred flesh, as the rival of Jesus the eternal Lover? Can the nun who passes, pass by pure, since I have eyes? and think of that Jesus whom they all love, and whom they press sobbing to their tortured breasts."

Pascase exclaimed:

"You turn words from their normal and true sense. It is absurd. . . ."

"But," replied Diomedes very gently, "I turn words from their course as we turn rivers, to throw them across the sterility of the waste land, where the pale and fragile

ideas grow poorly. . . . Your meadows are inundated, the grass rots under the stagnant waters; let me water the sand and return to the sun the muddy land which gives you a fever. You have a fever of morality and good behaviour, Pascase—and yet there you are seated on the terrace of a café prostituted to all these feminine eyes. Look, there is one who desires you. She feigns to be interested in her shoe-laces and she is lifting her dress in order to create in you a sexual idea to couple with that which has been awakened in her obscure nerves by the sight of your thick brown beard."

"She wants a louis or less," said Pascase.

"Perhaps, but that is not the essential. If she had been rich, she would have offered you the same glance, the same gesture and the same leg. She sells herself because she cannot give herself; today you will understand that remark which hitherto has seemed to you banal or merely witty."

The man of action is a mere labourer; the most insignificant tale-teller moves more life than a conquerer, and then if speech is not everything, nothing exists without speech: it is at once the leaven, the salt and the shape. Perhaps speech is to human action what the sun is to the earth, the exterior principle of formal differentiation, the absolute condition of vital movement.

The ordinary run of men think only thoughts already

ANDRE ROVVEYRE
FIN DV JOVR ANTE BELLVM AV MERCVRE DE FRANCE
ALFRED VALLETTE ET REMY
DE GOVRMONT

exhaled, experience only well-worn feelings and sensations as faded as old gloves.

"Christine is not dear to me," replied Diomedes, "she is agreeable to me. Since words do not have the same meaning for us, I must attain precision by making use of your speech. Christine is agreeable to me by her shape, her grace, her discretion, her pale look; and that is all. Moreover, she did not come to see me."

"Pascase, my dear friend, when 'yes' or 'no' are said of the past they are equally devoid of meaning; they are commingled in nothingness."

Women, those hedge-row flowers, belong to those who pluck them. If they do not want to be plucked, it is for them to wave the menace of their thorns since they are better provided than wild roses; before they give themselves, they are free, and after they have given themselves they are still free.

Perhaps they will still go on loving each other, from boredom, from pity, from lassitude.

She was so completely made not to write but to be the veiled lady who alights from her carriage in the aristocratic quarter, throws a purse to a poor widow, and disappears in a cloud of love, the lady who is generous because her loins are satisfied.

How solitary we are, my friend! Solitary and abandoned naked in the midst of the hostile world, deserted even by God. God no longer rules: this is the interregnum of infinity.

I want to play with life, I want to spend it in dreams; I do not want to believe; I do not want to love; I do not want to suffer; I do not want to be happy; I do not want to be duped. I watch, I observe, I judge, I smile.

Indeed, her richness frightened him, and desire died of an almost painful tension before the violent vision of the twin domes of her flanks, her body with its proud promontory of gold, her hard breasts flowering with bronze and purple, her shoulders sprinkled with gilliflowers, like those white marble rocks rising among lavender, thyme and mint beneath the opulent russet of junipers. She was red-haired and dark owing to her skin which absorbed all light and only returned a warm rich yellow-rose colour.

You must put on a girdle, Fanette, it is chaster and moreover art requires that nude women should be adorned with a girdle. The book-mark will do excellently. There. That is enough, with that little cameo to hold the eye. The navel is the aesthetic centre. Nature ignores it, but Art knows it; conform yourself artificially to the Nymphs of Jean Goujon; they are very beautiful.

The art of Saint-Sulpice is nothing more than the official

art of to-day placed at the disposition of the poor and devout classes by a few ingenious touches. During the past four centuries Religion has become prudent and has conformed with docility to the successive tastes which have reigned in the world. It follows and obeys. You may be sure it is incapable even of inventing a new ugliness.

Each social group creates a particular ideal of beauty and power, incomprehensible to the others. Higher up, where it is a matter of individuals and not of ant-hill castes, of intelligence and not of instinct, agreement of tastes and judgments is similarly rare, and occurs rather in words than in ideas. This little discovery has inclined me towards indulgence.

Indulgence is the aristocratic form of disdain.

One should not seek truth; but in the presence of a man try to understand what is his truth.

Would it not be charming and ingenious to classify poets according to the ideas and images evoked in them by the frail and mysterious fountain jet?

Pascase looked at the pretty creature with pleasure, a young flower, rich with all the charms of a flower, slightly dark of hair, like certain columbines, her corsage swelling like a poppy filled with milk. He wished he could carry her off in his arms to a far land and lay her down among fresh mints by the bank of a stream under the willows.

Lascivious? She is lust itself, active, conscious, almost reasoned lust. She loves the act for its sake, for the movement, life, immediate sensation it allows.

My friend, in the small world where I live and which I have helped to create, morality is not understood in the old fashion. We think that the most moral person is not the man who follows the law with docility but the man who, having created an individual law in conformity with his own nature and genius, realises himself according to that law to the extent of his strength and obstacles opposed to him by society.

I am as bored as a God, weary of my universe, solitary in the midst of my web, in spite of all the little flies which are caught, for they are all the same.

He understood the vacuity of the formula: "to enjoy life." Those alone enjoy who are unconscious of their enjoyment. The happy man only appears to be happy.

We are only moved because we do not understand. Emotion is a sentiment.

Mauve, who liked to take, allowed herself to be taken. Usually she was insinuating and imperious, violated gently, interested by successive capitulations, enjoying the retreats and starts of male modesty, which is only conquered when it becomes inflexible. Her game was close, certain and cun-

ning; she was a delicious insect of adventure, winding the spirals of her flight about her victim, humming like a bee; then suddenly the bee was silent, with calm wings, drinking the life of the human flower.

He did not think that flowers are beautiful because they are imprisoned behind bars, walls or ditches; the beautiful are so everywhere, in the woods, in the meadows and even by the road-side; if they are sometimes powdered with a little dust, they have also all the benedictions of the rains of heaven and all the good fortune of the sun. He was indulgent, for he had decided that upon the whole if the free practice of love was a defect in women, it must certainly be one also for men. And venality itself, if it dishonours the woman who yields herself, must it not also dishonour the man who accepts the bargain? Is it more moral to buy than to sell a turpitude? But why turpitude? It is not shameful for a man to live by his intelligence; it is shameful for a woman to live by her beauty.

Women are only truly beautiful for those they desire.

Solitary? Yes, I am solitary. Every conversation leaves me solitary, every intimacy leaves me solitary. I am solitary when I touch a friend's hand or a woman's knees, solitary when I speak, solitary when I listen, solitary when I cry out. It is true, but who, if he thinks, does not live in eternal solitude?

Beauty is now no more than a promise of pleasure; it is no more than the play of hands and lips, the immediate and banal joy of touch. Souls have become blind and there is no longer infinity in men's eyes or in women's breasts.

There is more virtue in some bad actions than in some good works.

Decidedly, other peoples' love-affairs have very little interest.

He loved her under the form of a fresh young tree, strong and long-haired, a tree to hold, to pluck a bough from, at whose foot he would lie in warm embalmed shade. . . . Suddenly he desired her. . . He saw her again, half swooning, her golden arms where the muscles slid like waves, her softly falling shoulders, her large deep breasts made whiter by the crimson of their gems; and he tasted that scent of lavender and mint, untroubled by the contact of the male.

Stronger than all religions, than all moralities, instinct commands and modesty obeys.

Such as he has become, man is a creature contrary to Nature; therein lies his beauty. But it is not ill that Nature sometimes recalls him to his origin, bows him towards her hard breasts and stony flanks, so that he knows that joy is to be a man and not an animal.

Neo, thank God, is not natural. It is not natural for a woman to be beautiful, white and a little golden. Her soul has made her beautiful, the darkness of houses and clothes has made her white, the hot-house of civilisation has uncoloured her hair, ambered the down of her arms, made her skin velvet, remade her body into a thing of softness.

Animal beauty is natural. Human beauty is not natural; it is a slowly perfected invention, a visible labour, the masterpiece of the intelligence.

Pascase, have you observed the kindness of God and his infinite patience in modelling his divine soul upon the human soul? His thoughts are always in conformity with those of the thirty just intellectuals who govern the world without the world's perceiving it, themselves led on their way by a being of election who is often unknown to mankind. God thought like Pythagoras, who is no more than a name; like Saint Bernard, whose ideas shock us; like Spinoza whom nobody has read. . . God is living, Pascase. He is indeed the Eternal. He transforms himself without losing a fragment of his divinity and phoenix-like he always arises different but essentially similar to himself from the pyre where the intellectual flame burns. . .

There are many truths. Some are alive; others are dead; the others will die.

And he also is venal, though he is the most honest man in the world and the purest heart. All is irony.

I pity her. She is tragic and deplorable. Virginity is tragic, like the dawn of day or the death of day, like the striking hour. It is nothing.

Let us speak no more. Ah! how much better we should have loved, if we had spoken less.

He is indeed a good specimen of scientific credulity, which differs from other kinds only in its object. Two centuries ago he would have defended the Bible against Bayle. To-day he defends Science—still against Bayle, against irony, against the smile.

Then he perceived that in the face of pain and of death, everything gives way, intelligence, social and moral distinctions, castes, virtue, all the chance garments with which man covers his naked instinct.

Diomedes, surprised, whispered to him:

"You shed tears, sir! Then you know her?"

"No, but every death touches my heart," replied the priest, looking at Diomedes with large gentle eyes. "And she seemed to me so agonizedly pure. I have heard the confessions of delirium. No ones dies with that grace, that abandonment to God, if he has had an evil soul though only for one day."

"She has sinned," answered Diomedes, who thought there was some mistake, "to the extent of her strength she has been a complete sinner."

"I know. The servant told me. What does it matter! Sin is revealed by the consciousness of sin. In themselves acts are only gestures: the soul is scarcely responsible for automatic motions. They alone do ill who wish ill. She obeyed the rhythm of life, could she break it? Strength is not given to all. To love according to our nature is to live in accordance with God."

God and life. . . Life in God, serious, cordial, rich with love and joys. . . Death has made me love life. By seeing men and women die I have come to understand how grave life is and how happy it should be to justify death. Having known injustice I have come to believe in the infinity where everything is annuled and in the magistracy of God who is the infinite and absolute pain of our sufferings. God suffers when He cannot know Himself and we suffer when we cannot know God. Let us love God and we shall know Him; let us go to His aid; beloved by men, He will know himself in the love of men, and every life of pain will cease, and every soul, human souls and the divine soul, will be beatified in infinity.

Every idea which is realised, is realised ugly or null. We must separate the two domains: Instinct shall guide actions; and thought, delivered from the fear of base deformations, shall blossom free and alone according to the enormous beauty of its absolute nature.

Be thou accursed, Thought, creator of all, but a mur-

derous creator, unable mother who hast never brought into the world any creatures save those whose shoulders are the footstool of chance, whose eyes, the derision of life!

FROM A FAR-OFF LAND

[D'UN PAYS LOINTAIN]

1898

A VIRGIN'S ADVENTURE

THE confession—and not the confidence—which I am about to make you, my dear, is one of those which must be complete, without reticence, absolute; no detail therefore will be spared your modesty; you will blush, you will weep, you will cry out, perhaps, but you will listen, for one human being must know my adventure to re-tell it to God!

You know I often return quite alone in the evening by the last train from Vassy to Chaumont. I spend the day with our dear Bergerette and, at eleven o'clock we are separated, I am dragged to the station, I am thrown into a compartment and doze until the minute when I fall into my father's arms where he awaits me on the platform and "always" guesses the right door to open.

This train, you might say, goes for me alone—or almost

so! It brings back to Chaumont by chance only a few tradesmen who have business—others would say love-affairs—at Vassy. Ah! how could I write that word now I know what it means! But these good people always choose the same seats and I think that in the last three years I have always travelled alone by that train.

All this is to show you that there was no premeditation in my crime; to make you understand that my adventure could not be organised or plotted; to make you believe that only a diabolical fatality could have urged me to commit an act which hitherto, like yourself, like all our pure and good girl friends, I had always considered equal to an assassination or a suicide!

So I was pushed into the compartment. We were late and the train was already moving, so that I only caught it by luck and because for this illusory train I am a sort of purpose, a sort of sacred parcel. We had already gone some distance when, recovering from my emotion, I noticed in the opposite corner a man wrapped in a rug.

Can I tell you—immediately, like lightning, with no resistance, with no remonstrance from my conscience, I was gripped, seized, carried away by the mad desire, a *mad*, absolute and unavoidable desire to be possessed by that man. I, a virgin!

My only reflection was this: That I had nothing to fear and plenty of time before me, since the journey without a stop to Vassy lasts exactly an hour; as soon as I arrived I should jump out and disappear.

The summons was imperious. I felt a strange and unknown heat in my face, in my breast and—I must tell you everything—in the parts of my body which had never before given me any very dangerous anxieties. I was as if intoxicated, with the intoxication which incites to yet another glass of champagne—no, those small girlish intoxications are nothing—I endured, not a temptation, but an unanswerable command.

I was neither silly nor awkward, and while an almost threatening chorus of voices cried in me: "Yes! yes!"—I was observing.

The man was fairly young, strong, not without elegance—the person necessary for the murder—for the rape!—I was about to exact. He moved, changed his position, awakened by my appearing and my agitation for, owing to a strange nervous movement, my heels were tapping the floor rhythmically. Soon he unwrapped his rug, rearranged his travelling-cap—and looked at me. I was afraid he would read in my eyes as in an alphabet, as in a missal with enormous letters; I was afraid he would despise a too certain prey! But I was really a beautiful prey, an inevitable prey and—since it was necessary—I looked at him in my turn. That was not all I did. No, I did something better: O diabolism of innocence and perversity of instinct!—I lifted my dress a little as if to wrap it round my legs, and I adopted a weary and insolent pose, the pose of a girl who is waiting and who does not wish to wait.

But I began to tremble; I shivered as in the first second

of a cold bath, and the rhythm of my heels accelerated with alarming rapidity.

He leant forward and said:

"Oh! How you are trembling! let me wrap you in this rug. . ."

His voice was soft. I answered yes with equal softness. He got up and brought me all his rugs. I was still trembling dreadfully; my eye wandered, I did not budge, my arms were heavy and my hands uncertain. He wrapped me up maternally, from my feet to my breast, tucking me in, patting me like a child in its cradle.

I think I really was cold; it comforted me and I smiled.

Then he grew bolder, continuing to pat me softly and unnecessarily, to smooth and press the rug along my legs and flanks.

I smiled seriously, I smiled—as a brazier smiles!

Then he grew still bolder. He leant his head towards me until it brushed my hair and, no doubt, not daring to say more, he asked:

"Are you comfortable?"

I replied by a very weak yes and—O my friend, can you read this?—mechanically (I really believe) without reflection, without will, but with a full consciousness of my act, with joy, I allowed my knee to open until it touched his. He put his hand on my knee, he pressed it, he insisted; I relaxed instead of resisting!—then he dared everything!

I was dying with desire, with lust! Yes, my friend, without stirring, without closing my eyes, still smiling, I al-

lowed myself to be taken inch by inch and deliciously! He did what he liked and everything he liked, I liked; I lent myself, I gave myself, I offered myself—and I rose up to a summit of vertiginous pleasure!

Yes, I let myself be taken—completely! Yes! and I myself took without shame; I kissed those chance lips, I clasped those chance shoulders,—and I cried my dishonour!

I was a happy animal.

As he was looking at me with fatuity (as I thought) or boredom or fatigue, the train whistled its arrival. I got up.

He said:

"I am going to Merville,—but . . ."

"No, leave me and go on. Only tell me your name."

He gave me his card.

There was just time to thrust it into my bodice when the train slowed down.

I said again:

"Not a word!"

He understood and went to the other window. I jumped out and fell into my father's arms. My sister who was with him began to laugh as she looked at me:

"How rumpled you are!"

I said I had been to sleep rolled up in my dress and that was all—for what possible suspicion could there be? Ah! I am perfectly calm about it. If God, as I hope, as I *will*, spares me the consequence of my crime.

And now, my friend, I am at the morning after and in this state: ashamed and joyous, humiliated and satisfied!

I know, I am, I live, a woman, like Psyche, through a man or through a succubus? Oh! what does it matter, since it is done, and since I shall never see the initiator again—for (I swear it) I burned his card without reading it. A renewal or even the possibility of a renewal would have been, no longer a crime, but a mean action!

I shall fulfil perhaps a common destiny—one of lies if I marry—but at least my first step in the mystery will have been bold, incredible and diabolic—or divine!—and even if I do not take a second step I shall remain happy all the same.

Happy at my fall, yes, and I repeat it, though you may be pale with fear or horror! I adore with blushes, but I adore the unknown, obscure and formidable Cause which laid me beneath the clasp of a passer-by—and that in the banality of a railway compartment soiled with every sort of breath, while the springs creaked, while the wheels as they bit the rails beat like the hammers of a distant forge, while the train rushed, madder than my blood, towards the abyss, towards nothingness! . . .

THE BAD MONK

He who had been called "the monk" on account of his chaste life and bitter remarks really became one for ever in the thirty-fifth year of his age. After long enervating conversations with a strange poet who had begun conscientious novitiates in all the monasteries of France, he decided for the Trappe and for that at Soligny, made illustrious

by Rancé, even more rigid and more mysterious than all the others.

He thought he had special reason to complain of life, of the women who had not loved him, of the men who had not understood him, of things whose hostility had risen up against him like a line of reefs between him and his desire every time he had launched his ship on the sea, every time he had set sail for Thule or Atlantis.

As a matter of fact, he had never shown anything but slight inclinations, tiny wishes as fragile as soap bubbles, as pretty and as vain. He was not even one of those whom Fourrier, the psychologist, calls "commencers"; he did not even commence, but always remained on this side of the starting-post. He could let himself drift and obey an outside impetus, like a bell, but he ceased to ring as soon as the rope was dropped. One of his weaknesses was to remain where he was; he was always the last to leave a drawing room, a theatre, a café; he had to be turned out of doors, always surprised that the hour had sounded. No doubt he would have made an excellent pillar-hermit and once perched on his column he would never have thought of coming down.

On the other hand, his friend the poet was a perfect example of the inveterate "commencer", ready to try everything, to taste everything, but only by accident departing from the realm of the Church where he was detained by an obscure and ineradicable vocation. In the Middle Ages, in the thirteenth century, he would have been one of the

wandering clerks, one of the Goliards, who went from church to church peddling pious legends and risky Latin songs, incapable of settling down, of conforming to rules, in love with new faces, unknown landscapes, adventures, always wandering and convinced that satisfaction is only to be found somewhere further on.

The "monk" would never have started by himself. The poet set him in motion. Short of money, but furnished with letters of introduction, they went on foot like peddlers, eating and sleeping in priests' houses, not always very well received, but conciliating ecclesiastical suspicion by a few grimaces.

The Father Abbot of the Trappe greeted them with affability, according to the rule of the order, remembering Rancé's instructions where it is said of guests: "Care shall be taken to treat them with so much charity that they may have no reason to think they are a burden and that their visit is troublesome."

After the first day spent in the peace of silence they were equally seduced and the poet very firmly resolved to begin his seventh novitiate there.

He did not persevere for more than a month and departed, leaving the "monk" behind nevermore to come out —thus confirming once more Pascal's terrifying remark: "Our own will would never be satisfied even if it had in its power everything it wishes, but we are satisfied as soon as we have renounced it." His merit indeed had not been very great, so mediocre was the quality of the will he had

renounced. On the contrary, for him the rule was a powerful principle of action and he hastened to obey mechanically, to walk with the flock like a docile sheep.

After two years of novitiate he was admitted to make his profession; he pronounced the three great vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and felt very happy.

Rising at two o'clock in the morning, fasting until midday, singing in the choir, working in the fields, living on vegetables and fruits, sleeping on boards, and many other austerities soon became part of his habits. Moreover the lack of food and sleep soon brought him to a state of torpor or hebetude from which he never awoke. At certain moments of the morning and evening he seemed to himself already dead or at least living only the life of a ghost, and he only regained a little consciousness of himself in the fields, in the sun when he turned the hay or reaped the wheat.

He did not experience the joys of the mystic life any more than most of his brothers—less than any of them, for he was neither devout nor pious, nor even a Christian. Nevertheless he punctually followed all the exercises, gave himself up to the prescribed prayers and reading, observed the rule in all its details, without zeal but without ill-will. *Sedebit solitarius et tacebit,* he shall sit solitary and shall be silent. The silence was pleasant to him; what a rest from the useless and tumultuous conversations in which he had wearied and worn out his youth!

Once only was he moved, to fear, to shuddering. When

a monk dies at the Trappe the custom is to respect his place in the refectory for a month and to serve the dead man's meal at the empty place. It happened that his two neighbours died almost simultaneously and for a month he had to eat side by side with the absence of two dead men! This impression was at first extremely painful to him, but was salutary by teaching him that he was not yet sufficiently detached from life, since the contact of death was painful to him; a few meditations calmed him.

Moreover, his own turn came. He had lived there for thirty years; he was sixty-five; it is an age seldom passed at the Trappe and not often reached. He had long fainting fits; he felt, and everyone else felt, that it was the end, and he resigned himself to undergo the great ceremony which accompanies the death-agony of the Trappist.

According to the rule he was taken down into the Chapel and laid on a heap of straw to receive the last sacraments surrounded by all the brothers. The Abbot, in violet stole, crozier in hand, recited the prayers for the dying; the kneeling monks spoke the responses. When the prayers were finished, the Abbot, seeing him dreary and hard-eyed, bent over and exhorted him:

"Speak, brother," he whispered, "here we have often known of sins kept silent until death, which have only passed the sinner's lips with the last breath of life. Speak, God hearkens and forgives you. . ."

"Father," said the dying man, who was a dead man the moment after, "Father, I do not believe in God."

EMERENCE

My aunts informed me that they had found me a wife.

I had reached the age when the man who has no social ambition begins to be bored by being alone and having no one to tyrannize. The need for tyranny or command or domination is inveterate in the male; often he only marries to be the lord and master, and if he is deceived, if authority escapes him, the disappointment is great enough to annihilate his will and degrade his character for ever. To avoid such a contingency, I intended to choose a wife who was docile without servility, gentle without stupidity, obedient without cowardice and with sufficient beauty and grace to give me the sensation of possessing a valuable animal, rare, dear and difficult to replace. Hitherto horses had been my passion; I did not hope to find a woman as beautiful as a beautiful horse, but as I should enjoy her with one sense more, a lesser beauty might give me a greater pleasure.

So I listened to what my aunts said.

They were old maids and twin sisters, and had brought me up with that respectful tenderness which in old families is felt for the eldest son, the head of the house; at the age of twelve they had left me free and would gladly have taken my orders if I had not already been sufficiently reasonable to refuse the responsibility they offered me. Moreover, I loved them very much, and it was always pleasant to me to see in them prudent advisers whose opinion or desires I accepted with deference.

"She is one of our distant cousins," said my aunts (they almost always spoke together—and you heard only one voice)," Emerence de V. . . She should please you in every way, for she has birth, fortune and beauty, if we are well informed. You should go and see her."

"Under what pretext?"

"We will arrange that. To renew family relations would be a convenient pretext, would it not? We know M. de V. . . would be glad to receive you; he owns some excellent shooting, he would keep you for several days and you could find out whether Emerence is worthy of you. As for Mme. de V. . ., she is ill and takes no part in anything."

Things turned out as my aunts wished, and I left for the Chateau de Boisroger, expected by M. de V. . ., who had sent me a most amiable invitation, "as soon as he knew my desire to make the acquaintance of my old cousin."

It was rather a long way from my house, but as the railway was five leagues from Boisroger I decided to drive over as the distance was scarcely longer. I possessed two good horses used to the bad roads of the district and set out at midday; at six o'clock I entered the courtyard of the Chateau, feudal stones not yet dishonoured by barbarous roughcast.

M. de V. . . stood waiting for me on the stone steps; I arrived punctually at the hour arranged; he seemed delighted, congratulated me on being so exact, and as a

country gentleman for whom animals are beloved and precious creatures, he gave long directions to the groom about my horses which, as a matter of fact, were covered with foam.

"You have strained them a little," he said," but I hope you will give them plenty of time to rest."

When I had made my toilet in a vast room with menacing tapestries, dragons and strange animals combatting knights armed with lances as long as the rays of stars, M. de V. . . returned for me and we went down to the drawing room where Mme. de V. . . as white of face as of hair, seemed to be dying in an armchair. Emerence near her was bending over a tapestry frame, and three large tawny spaniels were asleep under the high mantelpiece.

Mme. de V. . . replied to my compliment with a sick smile and words so feeble that I could not hear them; Emerence, when we came in had stood up, pushing her tapestry frame rather brusquely aside and had held out her hand to me, looking at me with large, brown, very joyous but very mysterious eyes. She was tall, pale, rather sturdy, full of life, but wearied by a shut-in existence with a sick mother; she seemed a little older than I had been told and had not at all the appearance of an unmarried girl. Since she had pleased me at first sight, this impression caused me a sudden little tightening of the heart and I asked myself whether my good aunts had not been misinformed, whether Emerence were not married! Then, blushing at my stupidity—for a marriage is something everyone

knows—I concluded that after all "a virginal air" is unimportant and that a girl of Emerence's beauty did not need that vulgar spice to seduce me. . .

During dinner and the evening, while I was as witty as possible, speaking in my turn and even more, for a stranger must make himself known in order not to disoblige his hosts, I watched Emerence and was soon conquered. Not only did I think her "worthy of me", as my aunts wished, but I asked myself anxiously if she would think me worthy of her; my ideas of authority and command lost their force and, to win Emerence's love, I would have obeyed her most absurd orders. To amuse Mme. de V. . ., we played a game of Pope Joan. Emerence won a lot of ivory counters and gilt medals which her father bought back from her with the less rare coins he willingly drew from a large deerskin purse; she was amused, she laughed, she threw me ambiguous apostrophes:

"Win in your turn, cousin! *Win from me!*"

Perhaps it was only ambiguous in my imagination but I was quite happy to be able to flatter myself that I did not displease her.

When the candles were lighted, at bed-time, Emerence said to me:

"Cousin, every morning I pick the fruit from the espalier before the sun has taken off its bloom; I am the only one who can do this. Will you come with me tomorrow morning? At seven o'clock, on the steps."

"We go shooting tomorrow," remarked M. de V. . .

"You shall go shooting another time," said Emerence. "He must see the espaliers. The peaches are as lovely as angels."

Emerence had her way and I was delighted.

A large white hat on her black hair, a large basket on her arm, wearing little sabots on account of the dew, Emerence appeared on the steps at the same time as myself and we set out for the espaliers at the far end of the park.

She had lost her joyous attitude of the evening before; she was even paler, her eyes were deeper, she seemed sad and I even thought I saw her tremble.

When we were about half-way she said to me suddenly:

"Cousin, you have come here for me, for me alone, with the intention of marrying me; I know all about it and I am very grateful to your aunts for having mentioned me to you, for I like your name, you are my relative and I should gladly be your wife—but first of all I must tell you a story."

She thought for a minute and then said:

"Do I really look like an unmarried girl?"

I replied frankly but with an indescribable emotion:

"No, you look like a woman."

"I look like what I am," replied Emerence.

I did not know what to say, I followed her with lowered eyes; I was trembling in my turn.

"You will hold the basket without shaking it, like that." She seemed calmer after her brutal admission. As she gathered the peaches she continued:

"Everybody knows the story, except you and your aunts; if you did not hear it now you would hear it afterwards—and you would never forgive me. When you know it, you will go away, after a few days of politeness, and you will think no more of me. I have had this experience several times; it will go on as long as my dreary youth remains. The story? How silly and vulgar it is. Six years ago when I was eighteen, I was engaged to M. de B. . ., a friend of my childhood; I loved him very much and we were allowed too much freedom; I had an absolute confidence in him; he abused that confidence, went away and never returned. Two years later we learned that he had already been married in some colony. He has died since. However, I had a child, and I still have it, a nameless child whom I love and who is my shame. This is the story of Emerence de V. . ., who is gathering peaches with her cousin for the first and last time."

"You are wrong, Emerence", I said violently. "I am rich enough not to be accused of being mercenary; I am richer than you, I will wipe out your shame and you will make my joy. Give me you hand."

Emerence, who was standing before me, began to cry silently; two streams of tears ran down her pale cheeks. I let her cry; she had to cry; the tears which ran down her pale cheeks had obstructed her heart too long; she had to cry.

Then she gazed at me with the anxiety of one risen from the dead and her large wet brown eyes asked me whether

I too had not lied to her; but I went to her and said:

"Since we are engaged, Emerence, let me kiss your hands."

A WOMAN'S DREAM

[LE SONGE D'UNE FEMME]

1899

I HAVE returned from the Pines where I spent more than a month. . . Her husband allowed her to pose out of doors in a little island of rushes and willows in the middle of the large lake. We went there every sunny morning; M. de . . . read his paper and smoked with the disinterested air of a husband who is only present for the sake of propriety, but who deep down is very well satisfied to have so beautiful a wife, to enjoy her and to be able to show her with decency. The pose was perfectly simple. First of all I had thought of the classic attitude of the celebrated Ledas; I wanted to place out of doors Michael Angelo's Leda who is overwhelmed with pleasure, or Chasseriau's Leda whose more discreet voluptuousness is also more lascivious and whose left hand caresses so prettily an illusory lover. But a docile and trained

model would be needed; so I left my Leda to her own inspiration, imposing no gesture on her, nor above all immobility, and I produced at fever heat and with joy a dozen sketches, one for each sitting, which I shall perhaps not retouch and shall show together as Monet did with his haystacks, his poplar trees and his cathedrals. This is what went on. Having arrived in the boat, we walked about looking for a place sheltered both from the sun and from human eyes; when the place was found I set up my easel and M. de . . . . took me aside every day to urge on me the same discretion, to make me swear a tragical silence. When we returned, Leda, seated by the edge of the water was feeding from her hand a large shy swan which beat its wings at the slightest noise, flying over the water, returning like a galley to the young woman who stretched out her arms to it. Beside her the long snake stretched out, slid along her legs towards the withdrawn hand and sometimes, for a second, the bird covered with his large angel's wings the shivering body of a lover; one day the swan's golden eyes seemed enamelled and Leda closed hers, duped by her part, ready for the illusory marriage of mythological dreams. But the creature, having eaten all the bread crumbled by Leda's trembling hand, turned away and disappeared like a cloud, and shook its tail with satisfaction like a duck. That was our best sitting. Mme. de . . . . assured me that under the caress of the warm but dripping plumage she had indeed felt a vague desire of stupration; as the bird opened its wings above her leg she decided not to

move, to let it happen. . . I do not know what her husband thought of this rather mad experience, but on the following days, without appearing to do so, he managed to frighten the swan which did not leave the lake and barely came for a moment to peck at the edge of the water. I have transposed to the beginning of my series these three last sittings where the bird seems to be courting like a timid lover. Leda is admirable; I had never before seen a nude of such splendour of form and of so living and so broken a hue; I mean by the word those mixtures of tones which ran over her flesh, the rosy ivory of the skin enlivened by the blue reflection of the willows, the little violet shadows which slid along the muscles, the sun falling like large gold coins on the shoulders from which they seemed to rebound like gilded water under the arms, under the knees, and to fly up like sparks towards the body where a dark crescent seemed to absorb them; the breasts under this network of light appeared freer and more alive; changing their shape with each movement of the body, they were always pure form, large flowers with an amber and crimson heart, galley-prows marked with the blood of manslaughter! . . .

To tell you the truth and as an expiation for this lyrical outburst, I must admit that if those prows have been crushed against many chests they have not pierced any. They are rather licentious than cruel; but the woman is so beautiful that if she belonged to me I should allow her anything. I think that at a certain degree beauty is an idol with the right to give its shoulders for anyone it

pleases to kiss. My Leda is not one of those pretty little women whose accidental little beauty is created almost line by line by the man who desires or caresses it; one is naturally jealous of such women since they are truly the work of our hands, of our lips, and of our eyes; but jealousy is impossible with a Leda; she is perfect; the man who loves her can add nothing to her. Nothing can be given to such a woman, scarcely even pleasure which she receives disdainfully, almost as a compliment; a man is not her lover, he is still her adorer when she forgets her divinity in our respectful arms. I have loved her as a painter and as a man, and I count these six weeks as the fairest in my life; they were Olympian weeks.

Perhaps there is no life except through us; a naked arm sliding in a rose-bush increases the beauty of the roses, and the grass is greener along the track left by a woman's dress; a desire rises in our heart towards everything that lives—and I remember that I kissed on Annette's lips the woods, the rushes, the heather and the rocks. Such memories, if they are mingled with a few grains of ironic pepper, are no doubt durable. I shall see. But I am sure I shall never forget the little squirrel I saw one morning run down a beech-tree to gather its winter store among the nut-trees. Fifteen times it went from its hiding place to the very tip of the branches where the nuts hang; it moved in light, timorous bounds, with its tail held over its back as in pictures; I could hear the sharp noise of the gathered nut and

then there was a sudden flight back to the tree which is its fortress. Does it pick the nuts with its teeth or with its paws? I do not know; perhaps with its paws, for the rodents are little men who eat almost as we do, lifting their clawed hands to their mouths. . . The same evening, under the same beeches on the edge of the wood while the grey slugs came down from the top of the beeches where they spend the day, I saw the wedding of the ants. Those which are to couple have wings and the couples join in the air; but as soon as the male has clasped the female, their wings are entangled, their nerves are agitated and the two entwined insects turn over and over and fall. The weddings I saw had been exalted very high above the trees, the golden rain fell from leaf to leaf with the sound of a shower, and as each couple touched the ground the two lovers, immediately unjoined, sprang up like the drops of a cascade and flew off rapidly and alone towards the sun and towards death. Strange and almost terrifying vision! I am very proud to have seen the sight and I despise myself for loving with so many precautions, turns and ruses, when I think how the ants give their whole life for life, and only separate for the females to carry the fertilised treasure to the ant-hill and for the males to die. I am inclined to think the males die immediately and that only the females fly up; but I was intoxicated at participating in this mystery and as soon as I understood it I began to reflect in order to understand it better. . .

Joconde has been to the Pines! I understand your last letter now. It is very curious. Do you not think this mutual love of our two mistresses is strange, and strange too that our caprices should have sunk together in the same gulf of hell? A pretty ending to a fashionable novel! As soon as I knew where she returned from, I began to observe her with diabolical curiosity. Her air was still calm and restful, but I would not endure an attitude which seemed to me a mockery and I wanted to torment her. She smiled, and it was I who suffered. Here roughly is our conversation:

I: "How is the Marquise de la Tour? Does she still think of my friend Pierre Bazan?"

She: "She did not speak of him to me."

I: "I hear her reader is very pretty."

She: "What reader?"

I: "A little white and golden haired Parisienne. I saw her in Bazan's studio, and when I say very pretty I speak of what I have seen. It was also at Bazan's, and with no more veils, that your friend saw her—and loved her?"

She: "Not for long."

I: "You see I am well informed."

She: "Not so well as I am."

I: "No doubt, since the reader left the Pines two hours after your arrival."

She: "It was I who sent her away."

I: "So you have rights over the Marquise?"

She: "Those of a very old friendship . . ."

I: ". . . and a very tender one."

She: "How you say that!"

I: "You fill me with horror!"

She: "Liar!"

I: "What! You think I can endure so equivocal a sharing?"

She: "All sharing is equivocal. This one would be innocent compared with those you have no doubt tolerated . . ."

I: "It is degrading."

She: ". . . But it did not happen. I went to the Pines to console an unhappy friend, that is all."

I: "Console! Do not mingle that word with a turpitude!"

She: "You cannot insult me; I love you."

I: "It is all over."

She: "No. I love you. I shall always love you, always, my dear. I love you enough to permit you any folly, even that of marrying a child; but I love you too much ever to abandon you—or to allow you ever to abandon me. I have loved you for a long time! I have watched you for years. Now I hold you and my arms are of iron. With your shadow I have lived a long sweet dream which has begun to be realised, but it seems to me that I am still dreaming and I do not want to wake up. You are my life, and I mean to live. I am sure of myself—and of you!"

I: "But I do not love you. I wanted to have you; I have had you; my desire has gone."

She: "Brutal!"

I: "I tell you again it is all over."

She: "It has scarcely begun."

I: "Nonsense! You do not suppose you can follow me about everywhere I take my wife?"

She: "You will stay near me, both of you."

I: "Perhaps you think Monsieur Dourdon will keep you as nurse for his grandchildren!"

She: "Poor man! He does not know I am the Counsellor's mistress and that tomorrow I shall be his wife!"

I: "A lie!"

She: "Oh no!"

I: "Good. He shall know you are unfaithful to him."

She: "So be it. And do you think he will give his daughter to his mistress's lover? He is an orderly man and very religious. He will marry me because he has promised it; but if he turned his mistress out of the door, at the same time he would shut his door to his mistress's lover. You will wait until you are married and then make your revelations? I do not advise you to do so. Annette perhaps would not be very happy to learn that during your engagement you left her at night to come to my bed. Moreover, that little girl cannot give you the pleasure you love. Inevitably you will have to have a mistress. I shall be there. Goodbye, remember I love you."

The motive for almost all the actions of women is

jealousy. Therefore Joconde is jealous. Her love wearies and annoys me; but I am not afraid of it. She is a sensual woman; she will forget quickly and will disdain the man who refuses her the accustomed joys. Ah! what an excellent governess the old Huguenot Counsellor chose for his daughters! His mistress, and a woman who inevitably captured him by complying! This indeed is the reverse side of venerable things. It pleases me. Moreover, in spite of my sentimentality to-day I feel quite well that I have renounced none of my vices for the future. Deep down perhaps I am only restrained by an old conventional respect, the fear of an old phantom which sometimes rises up in me, when I look into Annette's innocent eyes. Joconde fills me with horror but I do not detest her; in avoiding her I think of Annette and not of myself. If I had thought of myself while her breast rose with the agitation of my invectives, I should have stretched out my hands to enclose for my own profits the disarray of those beautiful blue-veined breasts. God! How complicated I am! Tell me something sensible, if you have any thoughts. I am afraid of feeling regretful when I see the lock on our door! . . .

Dear Adelaide: I think I am going to be married, if my father consents. My betrothed is very handsome. He is called Paul, a name I have always loved. I think I love him too, but I am not sure because I have not yet cried. It seems to me that if I loved him I should cry when he kisses my hands. But I laugh and look straight into his

eyes to see if he is serious. I cannot yet read very well in his eyes, but I shall learn to do so, for it is very useful to find out one's husband's real thoughts. This is what people do when they are betrothed, dear Adelaide: They think of each other first thing in the morning and meet each other, by accident as it were, beside the lake where there are large yellow flowers which smell good, and lots of flies; there you take hands and say the same sort of thing that other people say in the morning. Only he talks to me about the flowers and the flies, of which he knows the names; this seems funny to me and I laugh. Then he is pleased and looks at me. During the morning we meet again before lunch in a pergola where it is cool; he seems surprised, then we go into the garden and he chooses me a rose or a carnation for my corsage. When the bell rings he returns by the avenue of limes and I by the pergola. At lunch time, I sit opposite him; he gazes at me, but without forgetting to eat, fortunately, for I have heard Mademoiselle say that people need good health to get married. Mademoiselle also looks at him and so do I; she is very pleased about our marriage. Yet I thought I noticed that Paul pleased her; but, you understand, Mademoiselle could not marry Paul Pelasge. So she thought no more about it, for she is very reasonable. She is twenty-eight; at that age people are not interested in the follies of love. After lunch we all walk in the shade, then I go off through the avenues with Paul and Georges and Anne; Mademoiselle comes too. She reads a book without

paying any attention to us, for I think all these little love-affairs annoy her, and if we leave her we always find her in the same place. Afterwards I return to the house with my sister; sometimes we take long walks. It is more amusing, because the garden and the avenues abash me; once in the woods Paul kissed me; I was very red, but not very vexed. I must let him do it; when I repulse him, he is sad, and I regret the pain I have caused him. Another time he was even bolder with me; I did not realise it until afterwards, it seemed so natural, but I shall not tell you any more about it because such things are secrets. You will approve of me when you are engaged. Men have curiosities which I do not quite understand. I am always caught, but though I am a little ashamed I am not very angry really, for at that moment his eyes are pleased. That is all I can read in Paul's eyes; but I think it is not the most difficult. As soon as we are alone on these walks, he is silent and comes nearer to me; then I chatter to disconcert him. I have noticed he does not like me to talk in certain circumstances; if he is holding my hand, he drops it; if he is stretching his arms towards me he forgets what he wanted to do—no doubt to draw me to him and kiss me. I am afraid too of being rumpled, and that people should read on my dress things which only concern us. Am I not right?

I think we do not abuse our freedom, for I have no great emotions and feel no regret for those I have allowed or suffered. The tragic moment is in the evening, dear Adelaide.

We escape for an instant to sit down on a bench which is hidden, but Mme. des Fresnes regularly discovers us, and I think it is better so, because I should be afraid if we remained too long alone. Sometimes at that moment I have a feeling of languour which I do not quite understand. I think the scent of the large lilies near the bench gives me a headache. Why do we not go to another bench? I do not know.

The bench of the lilies is our bench; we return to it as if it were a lair, without thinking of anything except to sit there and to remain near each other, motionless and often silent. He takes my hand, he touches my hair, he says things to me which I have never heard and do not always understand. My heart beats; I let his leg touch mine and when he kisses my hand, I should like to kiss his. But I do not do it because I think too long about it, and then we hear the voice of Mme. des Fresnes talking very loudly to Mademoiselle.

Such, dear Adelaide, is the life of an engaged girl at the Chateau des Fresnes in the month of September, 189 . . .

I am not in Brittany, my dear Pelasge, but in Normandy, on the edge of a marsh haunted by sea-birds. Brittany is too well known. There is not a corner of the coast where the silence has not been corrupted and the beauty degraded by the dreary tourist. Nature is like women; one lover embellishes them, two weary them, three stupify them, after that comes degradation. Men have degraded

even the granite and the sands. A man who is not born of the soil, like the progeny of Deucalion, is a blot on the cloak of landscapes. There are obscene hats and indecent gloves at Val-André and at Saint-Lunaire; on fine days they are at Sept-Iles, Batz and Brehat. I have seen them at Chausey and Minquiers; when the tide is favourable perhaps they are at Boeufs and at Fourquie, at Dirouilles and Taillepied, at Cezambre and Cape du Groin. Imbeciles choose what is beautiful as birds choose what is fertile. They go to the points marked in red on the maps of the circular tauromachia. They rush at the red, stupidity first; stupidity serves them as horns. They smash the landscape and forget their boxes of Vichy Etat in the wayside inns, where water is never drunk. There is no water in Brittany and Normandy. The water baptises but is not baptised. The water is drunk by animals; it is full of frog spawn and is bad for the character. The tourist propagates soda water, pneumatic tires and snapshots. He carries away rocks he has not seen and stones he has not understood; he brings back broken things and the disguest of a Nature every reed of which meditates squeezing his throat. He passes along the road like street-walkers in the street, but the trees weep with laughter on his servant-like cap. He is so stupid he does not notice that the very pebbles put a tax on him. He pays to break his head, and to see the girls taking the calves down to drink; he pays to see the hay mown. He pays and is paid for; that is his revenge and his venom. It is for the tourist that Mont Saint-Michel

has been rebuilt in lard embroidered with pistachio nuts; it is for him that Avranches has built ruins and Granville a barracks; for the tourist likes to take art lessons by gazing at monuments, he likes fine ruins when they are in a public garden surrounded by chains, and barracks recall to him his absent country. I fled the civilisation of tourists, inns where timetables, the portraits of celebrated knaves and the illuminated features of the great Dab are posted up. At Havoque there is no civilisation. It lies between Creances, which is sand, and Lessay, which is waste land. For two hundred francs I bought a house composed of a stable and a garden where sea-thistles grow. Lessay is the Mecca of this desert. I found enough furniture to install myself as well as a coastguard. A fisherman feeds me when the sea is kind; and when it is not kind I make myself buckwheat cakes; it is very easy. I shall stay here as long as I possess a tube and a brush. There is no winter in these salt lowlands washed by one of the warm currants which bathe Jersey. Thank God, I am back at my job. Painting before everything, eh?

An atmosphere of gentleness and love hangs over our desert. Mock, tender heart, you mock the converted who have eyes only for the cross and ears only for the murmurs from on high! Laugh at us! I laugh at myself, but I am happy without being too much ashamed. I know very well I am a dupe, but I am duped in the direction of human life; the breath which carries me, carries me towards the

house I desire. The real way to dominate life is to obey it. I must obey it, since I want to be its master. Let us turn our sails to the wind; let us direct our illusions to the common end of all desires. The arrival will undeceive me; no doubt, but not the voyage. Do you think people would go to see the pyramids if they were at Saint Denis? Love is a journey which is never long enough; and the more uncertain it is the sweeter it is. I have not become sentimental; my sensibility has been developed until I only enjoy the fine shades and delicacies of life, that is the truth. Epilepsy is no longer the object of my walks and I prefer a glass of cold water to a glass of brandy. In fine, this desolate country is an oasis for us. The smallest flower seems a garden to us. Every reed is a palm tree for us. Bazan has written to you; but he does not write very well as soon as he leaves his impressions as an artist. For the last fortnight he has been living in a state very near contemplation. He looks at little Annette when he does not see her; and when he sees her, he absorbs her into himself, he drinks her with a look as a giant at a breath would drink a stream and every smile. She is charming with an uncertain and fragile beauty, charming with a passionate innocence. There is such an appetite for felicity in her that she is angelic; such an impatience to blossom that she impregnates all the air about her body with happiness. Her eyes are bright, her hair is bright, her complexion is bright; she is alight. Fairlie, who is a little dark, is quite illuminated by having her near. We meet nearly every day in the

afternoon at Bazan's studio; on the other days we go to Mme. Fairlie's house at Cavilly, where there are the only tall trees in the district. Bazan's studio is a stable like those given to the herds of Sardanapalus; the floor is of hard earth and the walls are expanded dreams. Seated on chests, on a little bench, we talk of colours, the sea, the sky and sand. The attitudes of the girls, their smiles and words, are the themes of our prayers; we listen to the distant noise of the furious waves and the whistling of the wind which passes over the roof with the rapidity of thought. Fairlie sees happiness in freedom, Annette would be happy if she were loved even in slavery. They do not understand each other but they adore each other; Fairlie takes care of Annette as if she were a precious plant, and Annette gazes at my love with large gentle eyes. Bazan draws lines; he symbolises looks and smiles by curves; he is re-discovering the path of spontaneity lost for three centuries since Leonardo by creating analysis created painting as a profession. The chastity of our relationships is delicious; it is so complete that it seems to me I disturb it by allowing my thought to dwell on it.

Am I living an isolated hour of my existence, or is this hour followed by other hours holding each other's hands? Is it the beginning of a day? The present minutes are agreeable, that is all I know; and I know also that they will end, but the future which is not clear in my thought, is equally obscure in my desire. Fairlie's feelings shall determine mine. If she loves me, I belong to her; if not, I

shall return to my tower and hang on the wall among the relics of the past, the blue thistle with which she pricked her fingers yesterday . . .

A woman is never less surprised than when a declaration is made her; she thinks those who refrain are fools or timid or cowards or impotent.

Oh! To have the immorality of nature, its cruelty and its beauty! Not to be a thing of intelligence, to feel instincts and violate the world rather than not satisfy them! Men and women now only know how to torment each other; if I obeyed the eternal law of desire I should be forced to despise or kill myself . . .

It is extraordinary how much life resembles a bad novel.

A NIGHT IN THE LUXEMBOURG

[UNE NUIT AU LUXEMBOURG]

1906

AT the first notice of the pious riots which transformed into fortresses our peaceful churches, peaceful in the fashion of old haunted castles, the paper for which I have been correspondent during ten years asked me for details with a certain impatience. Since I live in the rue de Medicis, having an old fashioned love of of the Luxembourg, its trees, its women, its birds, I walked down towards the Place Saint-Sulpice. It was mild, and the day was beginning to fade. The Place was occupied by children who were playing as they came back from school; large empty omnibuses passed round; a tram lacking one horse sometimes started with difficulty while another arrived painfully, then turned on itself without grace. My long residence in Paris has made me a saunterer, like any-

one else. Nothing surprises me and everything amuses me. Moreover I am naturally both sceptical and curious. That is why, as I lifted my eyes towards the church, my attention was keenly excited by the fact that the glass on the side of the rue Palatine seemed as if it were illuminated by the rays of a brilliant sunset. Now, the sun had not shone all day and even if the sky had been clear, no ray, no reflection at that late hour could have lighted the south side of the church of Saint-Sulpice. I thought there might be a fire, but no trace of one could be seen in the sky. Undoubtedly, something unusual was going on in the interior. I hastened towards the door in the rue Palatine. As I advanced without losing sight of the windows, I noticed that the glow now seemed to move along the church, as if bright torches were being carried through this end of the nave. At the moment when I entered, the windows near the choir were beginning to shine and those which are nearer the porch were dark.

Opening the door, I went towards the Lady Chapel, behind the high altar. It seemed illuminated for a festival, and yet I heard no singing, no music, and did not notice any sound. I walked forward with steps I thought were rapid, but which were on the contrary very slow, for to my great shame I felt myself trembling; in the vast silence of that dreary basilica my heart seemed to beat like a bell. At one moment the lights from the Chapel shone so brilliantly that I had to shut my eyes. When I opened them it was dark and only a few lamps spread their customary

vague glimmer in the complete darkness. A man was standing with his hand resting on the closed bars of the Chapel. Everything about him seemed ordinary. There was nothing remarkable about him except the profound attention with which he was gazing at the statue of the Virgin. I wanted to pass on, meaning to ask a priest or a sacristan first of all about the luminous phenomenon which greatly intrigued me and then, as was my duty, about the events which no doubt were being prepared for the morrow; I wanted to pass on, I was in a hurry to be done, for churches especially in the evening, are unpleasant to me; I wanted to go away, I wanted to speak, but I felt bound to the flagstones, I trembled more and more and I could not prevent myself from gazing at the unknown man. I saw him in profile, his hair which was short and slightly waved seemed to me chestnut, and so did his beard which was whole, not very thick on the cheeks and moderately long. His clothes were very much like my own, they were those of a man correctly dressed without pretentiousness; he wore grey gloves, and held in his hand a stick and a hat. I felt I was going mad, as I could not explain to myself the interest which kept me standing before so ordinary a sight. I did not understand either the attention with which the unknown man gazed at the Virgin. A lover of art would have passed on quickly, a devotee would have kneeled down. I began to lose my head, to feel ill, when the man, so ordinary and yet so strange, turned his eyes towards me. These extremely brilliant eyes com-

pletely agitated me. I lowered my own, not before I had noticed that the very pale face was extremely gentle and most intelligent. I even thought I noticed in the delicate features a smile of infinitely benevolent irony, such as I have seen on certain portraits of Lombard beauties. This smile enchanted and abashed me at the same time. "It would be a great happiness," I said to myself, still keeping my eyes lowered, "if I could enjoy that smile once again." But I dared not look at the unknown man who, I felt, was still looking at me. I had ceased to tremble, I felt in that state of happy confusion one feels in the presence of a beloved and feared woman. I expected nothing, and yet it seemed to me that something was going to happen.

We were about three steps apart; by stretching out our arms, we could have touched hands.

"Come," he said.

That single word was enough to calm all my agitation. The voice was very pleasant. It filled me with a gentle emotion. At the same time I became as free and satisfied as I should have been in the presence of a very old and loved friend. It seemed as if I had always known the man who was unknown to me an hour before. I found I was familiar with his face, his air, his gaze, his voice, his intelligence, his very clothes. An irresistible force urged me to reply to him in these words:

"I shall follow you, my friend."

All my surprise had disappeared, and although I realised

that this was a strange adventure, I was in such a state of mind that I did not feel it was strange.

I drew near him. He took my arm, which appeared perfectly natural to me. Were we not old friends? Had I not known him since I was two or three? Yes, and although he was certainly much older than I, he had played with me in my cradle. Everything arranged itself perfectly in my head. I repeat, from that moment until dawn the next day, that is to say the whole time I spent with him, I did not have one moment of astonishment. What happened, what I heard, what I said, the unusual happenings of nature,—everything seemed to me perfectly in its place.

I drew near him then and when his arm passed through mine, which I bent respectfully, and with the joy of a lover, a long and precious conversation began between us.

HE

That is what they call my mother! But they are full of such good intentions! Are they not worthy folk, my friend?

I

Very worthy folk. You do not find a resemblance to your mother?

HE

I have had so many mothers that no doubt this image resembles one of the women who have thought they brought me forth; what made me smile was their innocence, their virginal conception of maternity, the white dress, the blue

scarf. And yet this church, one of the ugliest in the whole world, is one of the least puerile; the priests who serve in it have retained some intellectual illusion. Their piety is honest and argumentative. The miracles anciently described seem to them proved by their very antiquity. They know I walked on the water one stormy evening, but if they had seen the glass of their church burning with light, would they have believed their eyes? You saw, you believed and you came, my friend. The light shone for you alone.

I

Oh my friend!

HE

To speak to men I need the intermediary of a man and I chose you, I made a sign to you. You were not obliged to answer. My power is not so great as to force men's wills. I can seduce, I cannot command.

I

I was very much surprised. I was afraid, but I walked as if towards happiness, as if towards a moment of love. But why did the light go out at the moment I drew near you?

HE

Because your curiosity had become desire. Nothing then could stop you. The iron was moving towards the magnet. Are you happy?

I

It seems to me that my life is being realised, it seems to me that past days were only a preparation for the present hour.

HE

So you are happy? But you will be much happier. There are things which men have always pretended not to know. When you have heard them from my mouth, you will receive at the same time the courage to repeat them, and that will bring you eternal fame, a fame which will last as long as the earth itself, perhaps as long as the civilisation of which you are a part.

I

Is there not another eternity, a true eternity?

My master, for I now felt that this old friend was my master even more than my friend, my master condescended to smile, looking at me with a tender irony, but he did not reply to my question.

"Come," he said, after a moment's silence, "let us walk in the Luxembourg."

I

How can you think of it?

This time he condescended to laugh. He laughed gently.

We walked round the dark church to go out by the rue Palatine. I noticed he took no holy water and when I

stretched out my hand towards the stoup he murmured:

"Useless."

* * *

When we had begun to take this morning meal, my friend, without concerning himself any further with the young women, took up the conversation which had been interrupted by their arrival. We were opposite each other. Two of our companions were seated on one side and the young one on the other, and she was occupied in sorting according to their shades of colour all the flowers she had gathered during the walk.

HE

My father . . . you were speaking of my father. I am afraid you have an exaggerated idea of him. He was, was he not, very powerful, quite intelligent, just, but you must admit, he was not good-natured. . . .

I

You speak of him as if he were no more?

HE

He is not dead, but he is old. In the end, the gods grow old. He has retired into the eternal silence of disillusioned intelligences. He still gives advice, he alone can explain certain human evolutions, but the indifference of the age has withered his heart. He never loved men very much, he has now turned wholly away from them. I, on the other hand, love them . . .

I

Lord . . .

(I got up to fall at his knees. He soothed my emotion with a gesture.)

HE

Why Lord? I am not your lord. Listen to me and be calm. See these youthful beauties, how quiet and smiling they are. They play with the flowers, they are looking at you with amused eyes; are you afraid of them? And yet, would you not say they are goddesses? Ah! how much nearer your women are than you men to nature and the divine! If you had a mistress I should have asked you to go and find her; she would look at me without timidity.

The religious conception you have of the world to-day, the conception you call Christian, from the name which was given to me during one of my visits to the earth, is one of the feeblest humanity has ever imagined. Practical intelligence has made progress in a certain direction; since the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers speculative intelligence has almost constantly retrogressed. To find a system which has some distant relationship to truth, you must add the kinetic philosophy of Epicurus to the fables of Pagan mythology. Take, if you will, if Latin thought is more familiar to you, the Poem of Lucretius and the Metamorphoses of Ovid; try to build a construction which gives its share to universal determinism and its share to divine caprice . . . It is difficult? Why? Men, although, as you

know, subject very narrowly to inevitable physical laws, are also in appearance apt for initiative, are they not? You are free, when you think you are free. It is the same with the gods, but the liberty of the gods is exercised over a far vaster matter, over a matter which, without being infinite (there is no infinite) is immense. Their power, however superior it may be, is of the same order as human power. Greece touched the knot of the question and if she did not untie it the reason is that it cannot be untied. The creator of the Universe, the regulator of the Universe, is destiny. Fatality reigns over the gods, as the gods reign over men and under its hand, my friend, we are all equal exactly as you are under death—geniuses, kings and beggars.

HE

Yes, you are a man and you will remain one. You must remain a man.

I

Shall I not become superior to other men when I have listened and have understood?

HE

Yes, if you do understand.

I

Then the Christian phase was an error of humanity?

HE

Humanity has never lived except in error, and besides,

there is no truth, since the world is in perpetual change. You have acquired the notion of evolution which within certain limits is exact, but at the same time you have tried to keep the notion of truth; it is a contradiction. If you succeeded in building up in your intelligence a true image of the world it would cease to be true to your grandchildren. For if the world evolves, you evolve likewise and man from one generation to another is not the same man. You are ceaselessly trying to find a resemblance between the old man and the portrait of the child. It is a mere game. But then, it gives you occupation.

I

Yes, the search for truth is one of men's great occupations. We are supposed to be happy when we have found it; and if we cannot find it ourselves, we share the discovery of a neighbor. The neighbor never refuses. The necessity for truth torments men about the time when the passions of the flesh leaves them some respite.

HE

Nature was cruel to allow her creatures to survive the period of physical expansion. But you have made use of that very cruelty and I think that many old men among you are happier than many young men. Truth is a faithful mistress to them . . .

I cannot modify even for an instant the form of your human brain, the habits of your understanding. That is why I take on all your habits of speech, and use all your

abstract words! Do not be deceived by this. It is not an approbation. Truth is an illusion and illusion is a truth.

I

But, your presence here, your words . . .

HE

You will not believe in me when you no longer see me and you will never know whether this night, this winter night, bright and warm as a summer morning, whether this night of happiness was a truth or an illusion.

(For the space of less than a second it seemed to me that the whole spectacle before me returned to the nothingness of dreams, but my eyes, which I had not closed, rediscovered the light and I was reassured.)

HE

Therefore I shall not tell you the truth, because there is no possible concordance between your mind, which is served by your senses, and that which is exterior to your senses. There is a representation; it is inexact, because it is fragmentary and momentary. A few little cubes of the mosaic have fallen from the dome, you put them in the hollow of your hand, you arrange their shades of colour and you think you have reconstituted the drama of the Universe. I shall not tell you the truth; I shall tell you what you desire to know. When you know it, you will not know anything more, but you will be content.

I

Master of enigmas and parables . . .

HE

The Gospels, my Gospels! Poor books, happy books! What a fortune befell those pious reveries of a few Jews unhinged by intoxicated Prophets! In them, imposture makes such naive arabesques with faith! Have you read the Acts of the Apostles? It is not as good as *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp,* but how moving it is! They touch God with their hands. And it is a fairy tale at the same time as it is a pastoral. I am everything. It is the pantheism of ingenuous conjurers. I am a carpenter, a fisherman, a prophet, a magician; I am hanged and buried; I rise again and descend into heaven; I descend once more in the shape of tongues of fire. I am one, I am two, I am three; I am a dove, I am a lamb, I am God, I am a man, and all at the same time. And the nations understand; the doctors explain. Everyone believes. Truth reigns. Happiness spreads over soothed hearts.

I

Was not this what you wished?

HE

Jesus, in whom I inspired a few elementary ideas, made the mistake of chosing twelve disciples. It would have been a mistake to choose one. My ideas, tumbled into those twelve heads, became twelve different sorts of madness. Then I took an interest in Paul. It was too late. So I abandoned him almost immediately. Nevertheless the

Church he founded has become a curious institution . . .

I

Men have thought it divine.

HE

For nearly twenty centuries I have observed this ironical development with distress. It has made me cursed, it has made me scorned . . .

I

It has also made you beloved.

HE

With what a love! Ah! my beautiful festivals of Ephesus and Corinth!

I

What did you say?

HE

At this moment you are listening to the confession of a god. A unique moment in your life and rare in the light of humanity. Take your love's hand and carry it to your lips. She loves you. You will listen to me more quietly if your heart is at rest.

HE

I have told you that the religion of the ancient Greeks was that which translated with the least ugliness and falsity

the real state of the Universe which is invisible to you. There are gods, that is to say a race of men as superior to other men as you are superior to the most intelligent or most domesticated animals. You have conquered the earth; my ancestors conquered space, and colonised most of the planets which gravitate about the sun. Our possible domain does not extend beyond the solar system; our real domain goes no further than Jupiter, where my father lives; and its true extremity in the direction of the sun is the earth where we now are. For a great number of centuries I have chosen Mars as my residence, which has brought me near to you and has given me certain human inclinations. The other planets, either from their distance or from their nearness to the sun, are inaccessible to me, almost as much as to you. I do not know what is happening in them. As to the infinite worlds which are distributed beyond our sphere, they are for me as for you, the unknown and the unknowable.

What I have just told you will not seem very new to you. Several of your philosophers have imagined things which touched this truth at some points. To mock you, Voltaire invented Micromegas; but, yielding to the appearances of physical laws, he made him a vast giant. Why? After men, are not the ants among the most intelligent animals on the earth? I seem to remember that at a very distant epoch which your geologists call, I think, the carboniferous age, the termites displayed a sort of genius on your globe. The slender little creatures were stopped short

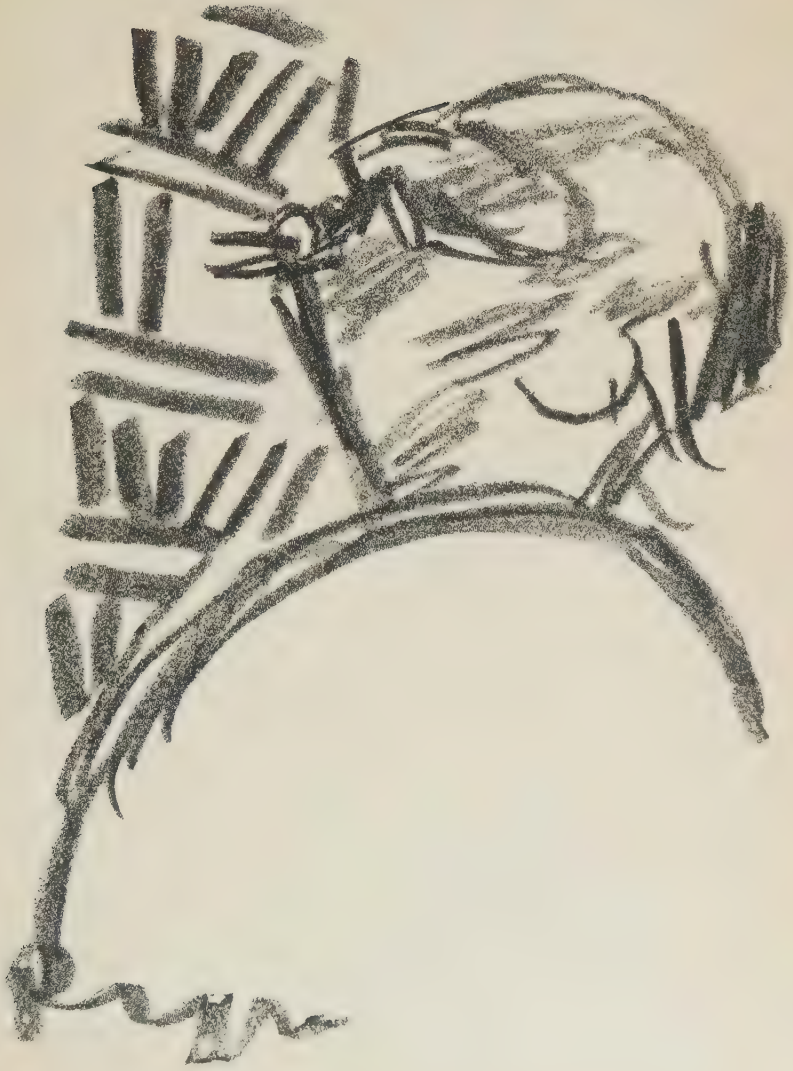
in their development by the lowering of the temperature. Their life has now slowed down, like that of other insects; their intelligence, being no longer fed by an abundant physical activity, has grown rigid; they have stopped at a point which they can never pass and now they only carry out mechanically what they formerly accomplished by choice and will. But let us leave Micromegas.

I

Micromegas scarcely interests us now. You have said, a little rapidly for my intelligence, a number of things which would interest me passionately if I understood them better. That slowing down of life . . .

HE

Life on the earth is precarious, when it is at the mercy of the surrounding atmosphere. Animals which have not a very high temperature are destined to expend their strength in a perpetual labour of adaptation. If the original heat had increased instead of diminishing, the termites and the ants perhaps might be two great nations sharing the empire of the world with man among their prey. But you discovered the art of fire and raised yourselves above all the other animals. Fire, which gave you a constant summer, also gave you leisure. Thence came your civilisations, the proud daughters of idleness who deny their mother. It is from idleness that everything is born among men. From the year when one of your ancestors was able to spend the



winter at his fire-side date the arts, the sciences, games, love, every joy. Leisure, that is man's greatest and finest conquest. But though you were able to conquer it, though you were able to create it, you have scarcely ever been able to use your conquests or your creations. Having conquered leisure you have dispised it, and slaves ashamed of the inactivity of their domesticated hands began to preach among you the sacredness of work. Poor fools! And are you not beginning to mar woman? Have you not already reached the point of insinuating into her heart the contemptible principles of Jewish morality? In your limited male pride have you not resolved to undo the work of your ancestors and to make paltry and diminished men of those creatures who dominated you with all their beauty and all their tenderness? You educate them; you teach them the useless stupidities which make your own brains ugly; soon you will forbid them dress, you will forbid them love, you will forbid them to make you happy! But I shall speak of this again later. It is a digression due to your curiosity. We were talking of Micromegas. Well, if you like, I am Micromegas reduced to our human proportions. I have no more absolute power over men that he had; I cannot even, like that Titan, crush them accidentally or for pleasure. I can do scarcely anything with men; when I strongly desire it I can insinuate a few of my ideas into them. That is what has been called my incarnations. I have never been incarnated. My own flesh, which is nearly immortal and nearly incorruptible, suffices me.

I

Nearly . . .

HE

The gods are born and die, my father tells me. I have never seen any of them die, I have never seen any of them born. But I was born, since I have a father and a mother.

I

Your mother Mary . . .

HE

Credulous child, absent-minded child! What matter the successive names men give us? The Greeks called my mother Latona; they knew me under the name of Apollo. Their religion was full of fables, but they were not ignorant of the essential of things. I do not know how the elementary truths were revealed to them. Perhaps my father in primitive epochs . . . I only began to concern myself with men about the time of Pythagoras. I inspired him with some happy ideas; he was supposed to be divine; and he was one of the few disciples for whom I never had to blush. Pythagoras civilised the shores of the Mediterranean. His thought, sustained by me, hovered like a thin white cloud over the blue waves of that maternal sea.

But Epicurus was perhaps nearer to my heart. His happier natural sensibility produced, under my inspiration, a finer intellectual flower. He knew a part of wisdom and was not deceived by analogies. He was intelligent, and

did not suppose a universal intelligence, inventor of systems, poems and practices useful to men's happiness; he did not imagine a supreme creator. He understood that men's temperaments are diverse and he did not advise them to seek one unique pleasure. He taught pleasure, that is to say the art of being happy according to one's own nature. I loved Epicurus. I only manifested myself to him in the form of an older friend, a traveller going about the world in search of wisdom. Once or twice a year he saw me arrive with joy, placed his slaves at my orders, did not conceal from me his wife who was pretty for a long time and for whom I felt a tender friendship. She was only jealous of her husband's tenderness, and never prevented him from taking delight in the caresses of a fair stranger. She herself was not insensible either to Ionian beauty or to Asiatic beauty; and this charming pure couple often shared pleasures they did not give each other. I accepted these voluptuous customs; more than once the indulgent night heard our sighs mingle with those of the sea whose perfumed waves broke at our feet.

These things happened at the hour when the young women slaves went down to the shore to wash away the stains of the day, before going to sleep. They played, they laughed, and we liked to join them in the water still warm from the midday heat. Wearied with long philosophic thought, we found a strange refreshment and a strength in the caresses of the waves which we gladly abandoned in the arms of the young women. Afterwards they

came and sat near us on the sand and sang, while we thought of uncreated nature. These songs never failed to attract the ardent young men; we knew it and when we were rested and refreshed we went to lie down on our mats, leaving new pleasures to grow like new flowers in the place of those we had plucked.

My friend, the pedants who poison your sensibility and stifle your intelligence have made you believe for centuries that the pleasure of Epicurus was a wholly spiritual pleasure. Epicurus had too much wisdom to despise any sort of pleasure. He wished to know and he did know all the enjoyments which may become human enjoyments; he abused nothing, but he used everything in his harmonious life.

During the earlier hours of one of these happy evenings we discovered, as the result of long mediations and long discussions, the system of atoms. It was a great effort of the mind, the greatest which has ever been created among you and outside of you. To conceive of the Universe as the product of a series of chances, that is to say, a series of facts rebounding one on another to infinity, is a conclusion which the noblest minds of your time scarcely dare to adopt, although it seduces them. Twenty centuries of Platonism have so deranged men's understanding that simple truths no longer remain in it. Yet all the systems you have imagined are refutable, and that of Epicurus is not. Shall I explain it to you, not as it has been disfigured by your professors of philosophy, but as we built it up in our Ionian evenings?

I

We scarcely know the system of Epicurus except through the Poem of Lucretius . . .

HE

Perhaps the most beautiful of all human works . . . Ah! if men had taken that admirable book as their Bible!

I

Should we recognize a little of your thought in it?

HE

Much, my friend, much. I guided towards Zeno the young Lucretius who learned from his mouth to love and to understand our Epicurus. In that dark Roman genius I found something of the voluptuous reason which ennobled Epicurus, a like desire to know and at the same time the respect for the secret impulses of life. His existence would have been that of a dreamer if the future had not tormented him with its passions. He was beloved, he was persecuted by jealousy, he who only asked from his mistress the peace of his flesh and the peace of his thought. He loved. Love made the dreamer into a contemplator. He wished to know the cause of love and he found that love is life itself; he wished to know the cause of life and he learned that life, that is to say eternal movement, is its own cause. The vast adventures of ambition which he witnessed also contributed greatly to detach him from social pleasures. The simple and exact actions of animals

seemed to him more interesting than the bloody contests of a few madmen who bought with a crime the certainty of dying by a crime. At the moment when he was writing his Poem I was almost the only visitor to his Villa Lucretia, not far from Albanum. It was a farm rather than a pleasure house, and often as we returned from a walk we helped with the harvest or the vintage. Memmius, if he were there, watched us or played with the girls. Memmius was a fashionable and rather licentious sage. In the evening we continued our conversation. I revealed to him entirely the mysteries which the jealous Zeno had half concealed from him. At my next visit he read me the last pages of his Poem and I discovered with happiness the ideas and genius of the noble Epicurus in that tongue which is less supple but more solid than Greek:

"Mother of the Romans, O pleasure of men and gods, noble Venus, it is thou, under the dome of heaven where the stars wander, who dost people the ship-bearing sea and the earth rich with harvest; it is to thee that all which possesses life owes birth and the sight of the sun's rays . . .

I

". . . at thy coming, goddess, the storms depart and the clouds take flight . . .

HE

". . . for thee the earth sends forth the odour of her flowers, for thee laugh the waves of the sea . . ."

I

Lucretius is now hardly esteemed among men. He is considered immoral, having spoken of love without hypocrisy and of death without illusion.

HE

Yes, he knew too many things which are wounding to your childish sensibility.

I

I am thinking of a remark of Bossuet's, a remark in which he tries to show contempt for antiquity: "As soon as the cross began to appear in this world, all that had been adored on the earth was buried in forgetfulness. The world opened its eyes and was astonished at its ignorance . . ."

HE

And it was I, it was I! So many absurdities in my name! . . . But our young women have fallen asleep, their hair mingled with the flowers they were arranging. Let us leave them undisturbed. Take away that lilac which may give them headaches. O divine creatures, you know everything, knowing love, and you do not need our vain philosophies . . .

I shall not tell you what matter is, for I do not know. Matter is what is, what has always been, what will always be. With Epicurus I conceived it as an infinity of atoms or points meeting by chance and forming groups here and

there; now it rather appears to me as a fabric, but it comes to the same thing, since there must always be voids between the continual elements of this fabric. Without that, we should have an immobile and consequently inert mass. We cannot suppress space, yet its reality is impossible to conceive; for if space is empty it is nothing and without that nothingness nothing could exist.

Admitting matter in the form of a fabric, we suppose it composed of an infinity of lines cutting each other in every direction; but a line is made up of points; let us come back to points again, it is clearer, though not much.

Your chemistry believes it has reached the limits of analysis by discovering the molecules it counts and weighs. But is is evident that a point which can be weighed can be cut into two points which can also be weighed, and so on to infinity, and thus without limit of space or of time. So there are two infinities: one above us, since every figure can be increased; the other below us, since every figure can be diminished. Yet since space must be considered as an absolute void, as perfect nothingness, as nothing, it may be that each of these two infinities suddenly ends in this void, in this nothing. The Universe is perhaps limited, this fabric is perhaps a ball isolated in the midst of nothingness. As we do not see how something can come out of nothing, or how something can become nothing, we conclude in the eternity of matter coinciding with the eternity of this nothingness. Thus we have being and not-being. But as not-being is perfectly inconceivable, although necessary to

the existence of being, we shall leave it on one side, and any way what could we do with it?

I know that one of your learned men has recently spoken with a certain amount of logic of the final destruction of matter; I do not think that this idea has a really perceptible meaning, either for men or for gods. What is, is. Disaggregation, moreover, does not mean destruction, but change. The face of things has changed and will change again, but the very essence of things is eternal as chance. This Universe is only one of the innumerable playings of chance, one of the fortuitous moments of eternal movement . . . Does this bore you?

I

After our personal life what is more interesting than the personal life of the world?

HE

You will die, the world as you see it will die also. The movement which created it, by chance, will destroy it by its very continuity. The vulgar eternity you conceived is only a moment. Have you seen a top in motion? There is a moment, towards the middle of its gyration, when the circles described by one of the points of its circumference are all described with a practically equal speed. The stellar system by its precision should make us admit that the top of which we form some of the atoms is about half way through its spin. Movement is not perpetual, as you

know; therefore the gyration must necessarily go slower until the top falls on its side and dies.

I

O our dreams of eternity!

HE

Am I harming them? A man dies, a man is born. A world dies, a world is born.

I

Renewal is not eternity.

HE

You are dreaming, not of eternity, but of immobility. The eternity you have conceived is only a cessation of movement. The eternity you should conceive is the perpetuity of movement. The eternal movement moves us all, men, gods and worlds, for an instant in the infinities of chance . . .

I

So all human effort, our philosophies, our sciences, the painful and superb edifice of our civilisations . . .

HE

Destiny is more beautiful than all civilisations.

I

But if they must perish, at least let the memory of them remain in the intelligence of the gods!

HE

Can the gods survive the Universe from which they were born? We are your brothers in mortality. Epicurus knew that. He never thought of the gods except as provisional immortals. Moreover, he never entertained the strange idea of a unique, infinite, eternal god. This belief had already been imported into Greece from Asia but as the Greeks did not understand it, they presented the whole of their Pantheon with an ironical immortality. Plato and Aristotle took up the idea, trying to make it reasonable and only succeeded in showing better its philosophical inanity. I did not allow Epicurus, whom I loved, to lose himself in those metaphysics. God is a dream, charming or cruel, useful or dangerous, according to the heads in which it reigns, but he is only a dream. Is it necessary for me to explain to you the impossibility of God? For men, God is not a process of reasoning but a sentiment. Your best philosophers have understood this so well that having denied God in their intelligence they have hastened to affirm him in their heart. Perhaps that is what I should do if we were to remain in human regions, but I have come to raise you above men—for an instant, before allowing you to fall back.

I

Master, have I displeased you?

HE

Those whom I have raised above the earth have almost

all fallen back. The happiest died a few moments before their perjury. The others betrayed me. But listen to me. Have you ever reflected on the incontestable mathematical truths? In any case, you know that one is one and that nothing in the world can make one be two or two be one. In the human brain each impression, each sensation, each image, each idea must find a separate habitation in which to lodge. Who imagined a central cell to replace the soul? A useless imagination, for this cell could only be a reduction of the brain, as the brain is a reduction of the world. A single centre of cognition is an absurd conception; this unique centre is necessarily composed of as many receiving elements as there are knowable elements. Therefore God cannot be conceived as a simple being. If he existed, he could only exist complex; he would be very like a man, he would be very like me, who am a superman. Multiply yourself to infinity and you have the only Almighty really conceivable. The modest religions and philosophies which have imagined God in the form of a perfect man at least remained within the limits of a reasonable analogy. I, one of the gods whom men adore, I tell you in all divine humility: I am a man and God is a man. You will never go beyond that honest conception without entering absurdity. What is the god of your metaphysicians? An abstraction which has no more possible reality than heat, good, penetrability, truth, beauty or weight.

The religion of the Greeks was charming, especially in

their latter ages; yours has sometimes given me pleasure. The ancients understood the religion of beauty and of pleasure, you know the religion of grace and tenderness. I despise your philosophies, which are only skilful intellectual constructions; I have never been able to despise your legends and your superstitions, the traditional politeness of your minds to your sensibility. But this is the field reserved for the exercises of the people, of children and of timid women. The only noble human creatures are those who adore themselves and who strive to draw from their nature all the vain happiness contained in it. Vain, but real, the sole reality. To know that there is only one life and that it is limited! There is an hour, and only one, to harvest the grape; in the morning it is sharp, in the evening it is too sweet. Do not waste your days either in weeping for the past or weeping for the future. Live your hours, live your minutes. Joys are flowers which the rain will tarnish or whose petals will be scattered by the wind.

I

Epicurus, Epicurus!

HE

Yes, I wish you to be a new Epicurus and to repeat to the men of to-day what my friend taught of old to the Athenians. Apostles have spoken in my name and have succeeded in spreading throughout the earth a doctrine of despair. They have taught contempt for all that is human, for all that is smiling, for all that is luminous. Inapt for

natural pleasures, they have sought pleasure in their own pain and in the pain wherein they plunged their brothers. They have called the earth a vale of tears but those tears were made to flow in abundance by their malevolence. Spiteful to themselves, they were spiteful to men who became the slaves of their dark dreams. After having promised their faithful an eternity of chimerical joys in exchange for the true simple joys they stole, they took even hope away from the hearts of men—they imagined hell. Sons of the old priests of Baal they set up the cruel idol of their fathers under my name and made me the hideous and foreseeing creator of the future damned. Yet these monsters have not discouraged me and I have supported with my inspiration all the efforts of natural wisdom which I have seen produced amid all these horrors.

Alas! They still hold you and the different sort of priests who fight them are sometimes even more malevolent priests. Your morality to-day is the basest and dreariest which has ever existed. The exterior hell in which you no longer believe has entered into your hearts, where it devours all your joys.

I

Yes, we are sad. The fear of sin has survived in us the belief in sin. We dare not enjoy anything. We despise the man who sits in the sun to drink in the first rays of spring, but we envy his baseness, for we call all unproductive leisure baseness. When we can no longer work, we go and watch others work.

HE

Your social state is a spectacle of madness. The Roman slaves had a life less harsh than many of your workers. You even make women work, in the Semitic fashion! Rich and poor alike you are ignorant of all the joys of leisure. You give all the hours of your days to work, some to have bread, others to conquer a pleasure which weariness prevents them from enjoying, and others, even madder, to increase their fortune. You have reached that degree of imbecility which looks upon labour not only as honourable but as sacred, when it is merely a sad necessity. You have raised that necessity to the rank of the virtues, when it is doubtless only the vice of a corrupted being for whom this brief life is only a long boredom.

I

And this labour, which at least allows a man to breathe and to eat, does not exist for all. Thousands of creatures, in the most civilised towns, die of hunger every day. Oh! from a slow death! they agonise for ten, for twenty years.

HE

Increase and multiply. That is the work of my father. He was taken with a sort of jealous and wayward love for the Jews, a restless little nation, and he showed himself curious to encourage their natural pride until it became inordinate. The results were comical and sad. These ignorant Bedouins thought themselves destined to domi-

nate the world; then they disappeared as a nation, at the very moment when that domination was being carried out. A strange destiny for the Jews to have given men a religion in which they did not believe themselves!

Alas! At the request of my aged father who began to be weary of the prolix barbarians, I first tried to give Jesus wisdom, but he had too many disciples, so I interested myself in Saint Paul. I came to him, as I came to you; he was dazzled and believed the vision conferred upon him a divine mission. I followed him in his travels. His energy amused me; but at Athens I placed myself among his contradictors whose laughter I excited. Later I let him die without consolations; his pride sufficed him.

I thought the man less mad than the other thaumaturgists who, like him, amused the crowd; but the idea of God went to his head and he began to believe in me, attributing omnipotence to me. It was then I ceased to visit him, for I do not like to make myself the facile accomplice of religious ravings. Left to himself, he continued to hear me; my voice rang in his deaf ear like a hum. His faith was exacerbated and he accepted martyrdom. How different from that charming Epicurus for whom our conversations were never anything but a superior recreation! But Paul, although hallucinated, was not incapable of a certain amount of imposture and it was certainly to increase his importance in the eyes of fools that he pretended he had been ravished up to heaven. It is true he believed in my resurrection. What tales! It is as if men only give words

an exact meaning in order to have the pleasure of using them in their wrong meaning. Your brain plays strange games. The dead are dead. The dead are perhaps not dead. The dead are living. The dead are the only living. What jugglers you are.

HE

I understood then the particular beauty contained in the new religion; it had more grace than the purest Paganism and something ingenuous and tender which I had not before met. Stoic insensibility became ridiculous; the fashion was to suffer; the rose-crowns were changed into crowns of thorns. There were long ages of stupor, and when the human soul woke again and tried to smile, its smile was that of melancholy. Perhaps men will never be healed from the wound Christianity made in them. Sometimes the wound has seemed to heal over; at the least touch, at the slightest fever, it opens again and bleeds. Blessed are those who suffer! That senseless remark still haunts your feeble heart and you are afraid of joy from vanity. You have accepted the curse hurled against the happiness of living by a few despairing Jews and when you laugh, you beg forgiveness of your brothers, for it is written: Blessed are they who suffer.

Man, who is always pretending to revolt, is the most obedient of domestic animals. Successively he has accepted the most infamous precepts of every code of morals, and among you it has always been a claim to honour to kneel

down before a decalogue and to be beaten on the back with cords. The great hypocrites have always been the masters you prefer, and you are still heard to whinney after the idea of sacrifice. Your sensibility has flowered ill; your intelligence is insufficient. It has always been duped by the directors of conscience who have succeeded each other on your shoulders. The preachers of virtue rarely practice it. You have always had to deal with thirsty throats whose one object is to make you believe that the fountain is poisoned.

The moralist is the eternal old man who draws a terrible picture of love for the girl of whom he is amorous. Advice which thwarts the development of energy is always hypocritical, that is to say, interested advice. There is also the naive imitation of hypocrisy; there are the fools, the vain, the minor cunning ones; but the masters are the persons to unmask.

I

What! Have there never been great sincere minds, real friends of mankind?

HE

You must not take tragically what I have just said. The greatest hypocrites are never perfect hypocrites. There is always a portion of sincerity in them. The exercise of sincerity is the most natural thing for men. A great deal of will is needed to create a factitious character; a great deal of talent and perhaps even some genius is also necessary. The hypocrite, by showing himself under a factitious

aspect, diminishes his pleasure in living; he only recovers it wholly when he has formed a large number of disciples in his mode; hence the proselytising of the great creators of social lies. But hypocrisy ceases when the new society is created, itself the creator of new characters. The first Protestants, to depreciate the Papists, feigned a certain rigidity of morals. This hypocrisy became traditional, then it became hereditary, and now it is with perfect good faith that the Calvinists proscribe from life everything which makes its beauty and its sweetness. The Catholics, by a ruse of war, have gone ever further, at least in their preaching, in the contempt of pleasure, and they also with complete naiveté and good faith prescribe the exercise of certain virtues, the practice of which would make humanity fall below the state of savages. Moreover the philosophers to-day hold much the same language and they would be very astonished, if they were hearkened, to see civilisation with its delicious complications fall into ruins and make the earth like the fields where Troy was and the desert where the phantom of Timgad still rises.

We must consider separately the moral theories of humanity and the form they give to its daily life.

I have spoken to you of the great hypocrites. There were also the great simpletons. Neither have had the influence on the general movement of things that you might suppose. The world of ideas and of words is one world, and the number of facts and of activity is another. No doubt they react a little on each other. But so little and so

slowly and with so much delay that their reciprocal influences are very difficult to determine. Only in the last fifty or sixty years have the social ideas of Christianity seemed to take on an active form, but with what timidity! Perhaps Christianity will one day be realised practically, but then it will long have disappeared as a religion, as a philosophy, as a code of morals. And a new dissonance between thought and life will be visible. This long-dated realisation of the great social doctrines is perhaps only an illusion. The field of thought and the parallel field of action have limits; the same thoughts must therefore return with the turn of the wheel, and the same acts. The near or distant coincidence is perhaps fortuitous. In vain do you think and speak; action is unfolded on another plane and the two planes perhaps can never intersect each other.

At most it may be admitted that the uncertain spectacle of things inspires man with a twittering like that which seizes the birds when the sun rises. But would you say that it is the twittering which makes the sun rise? Your arguments about the power of ideas, which are supposed to be the creators of action, would resemble that. Men's ideas can never be anything but ideas after the event. The future? Do you even know what the weather will be tomorrow? The future you pretend you foresee is only a past arranged by your imagination and your sensibility. You think what you desire to happen will happen. Children!

The exercise of thought is a game, but the game must be free and harmonious. The more you conceive it to be useless, the more you should desire it to be beautiful. Beauty is perhaps its one possible merit. At least do not allow those little grovelling ideas which haunt corrupted brains as wood-lice haunt rotten wood.

I

Then our thoughts are freer than our acts?

HE

With them it is easier to retain the illusion of liberty. Men and gods, we are wholly subject to destiny and nothing happens which is not the logical and necessary consequence of the previous movements of eternal matter. We are ships inevitably carried by winds and tides towards an unknown end; but it is one thing to descend the invincible flood by steering among the rocks and another thing to drift round and round. Thought is a rudder which should never be loosened or placed in unworthy hands.

But these are very general ideas and can scarcely, I think, bring you very much comfort. I am behaving like the apocalyptic preachers who substitute personifications for reasoning. I did not come to you to offer you models of eloquence or piquant enigmas. If I make yet another effort in men's favour, I wish to be precise and clear. But alas! there are questions where the gods themselves are lost like children in a wood. The reason for things eludes us

as well as you. We also are the dust of infinity, a little more brilliant, that is all.

Certain problems, however, are considered as solved in our assemblies. They still agitate you. We have made them subservient and our intelligence dominates them. I shall place the solutions in your hands, and then we will take a walk through this spring which perhaps you will never see again . . .

I

Never? What, never?

HE

As beautiful, as tender, as limpid and as perfumed. I have no power over your human destiny, I do not know what it is. Before I descended. . .

I

And how, master, did you descend among us?

HE

A little girl's curiosity! I come upon earth as easily and as naturally as you go to America. How? It is quite useless for you to know since you could never profit by it and it would only lead you to childish and dangerous experiments. But there is another question you dare not ask me and to which I shall reply, for if it is not on your lips it is in your head.

HE

I was about to say to you, my friend, in accordance with your secret desire, that our life above, over there rather, is very different from the life of men. First of all, there are a very small number of gods, at most two or three thousand men and women. I say men and women because we are only that with superior faculties. Raise the genius of your geniuses by several powers and you have the value of those among us who dominate the others. The least among us are still gods, that is to say their sensibility, their intelligence, their strength, their beauty attain a degree which you can with difficulty imagine. Your arts, your sciences, your noblest passions with us are instincts; so we attach little importance to them. The length of our life has taught us the uselessness of everything which is not pure sensation and our principal industry is the cultivation of our senses, which indeed are highly developed. We devote ourselves with a divine ingenuity to every pleasure and it would be difficult for those among us who have not frequented men to understand the meaning you have given to the words lust, gluttony, idleness. The delights of comparison on the other hand are unknown to us and we are not acquainted with vanity, lying, envy or anger. Our pride is only the consciousness of the strength we feel living in ourselves.

Our women differ little from yours, that is to say they have the same relation to us that your women have to you. We do not consider them as inferior, but as different, and

this difference makes our mutual happiness. They are admirable creatures of pleasure, but the pride which is natural to them makes them egotistic. My friend, even for a god, especially for a god perhaps, your women equal ours. They can forget themselves in love, they can make their own happiness from the happiness they give. If their senses are less delicate, their flesh less perfumed, their art of pleasure more rudimentary, their hearts are more sensitive. Ah! To read in their eyes gratitude for the pleasure they have given!

I

Now I understand the super-human happiness I have found in your arms, O queen! But can this be possible! Have the times of mythology returned?

HE

As you see. They were never abolished except in your beliefs, except in what you believed you believed. For is not Christianity, like all the religions it thought it destroyed, the story of the relations between gods and men? Does the visit of a dove to the fairest of Jewesses differ so much from the visit of the swan to the voluptuous Leda? The spirit in which you consider these divine anecdotes changes with the centuries, but the anecdotes are always the same, because love is always the same. If your priests could hear me, they would say I was blaspheming, I who was the swan, I who was the dove. But when they say that

I was the son of the dove, they believe they are affirming a great truth, and perhaps they are right because that fable has changed the colour of the sky. But the colour of the sky will change again, and they will not perceive it.

Hitherto all your science has consisted in giving different names to different appearances. Perhaps one day you will know that the same thing always happens, that is to say, nothing; and, abandoning the unreadable romance of the infinite, you will live your own life. It is worth the trouble. One day you will learn that, and you will be very much surprised that you wasted so many centuries in vainly scrutinizing phenomena of which you perceive only the broken reflections in a sea tossed by the storms of your imagination. The life of the gods, my friend, differs from yours in this above all, that for them life is without finality. Our acts are sufficient unto themselves and we do not seek their justification in near or distant consequences. The misery of your activity is that it foresees repose. Our end is in the act; your end is in the results of the act. But since happiness is in the act, you pass it by, and when you repose it is in weariness and boredom. For us, to live is to act, and to act is to be happy. Perhaps rather than super-men, we are superior animals; intuition serves us as instinct and if we sometimes feel regret, we never know remorse. Passion, which may mislead us for an instant, leaves us satisfied as soon as we have obeyed it, even when our desire cannot be entirely realised, even when our curiosity has been compelled to halt midway.

There is left us then the fact that we have exercised our faculties of activity against an obstacle; we bear no ill-will to the obstacle. Like children who have lost the game and yet are very glad they played.

I

It is true, man wants to win, always to win, and when conquered if he does not suffer in his vanity he suffers in his pride.

HE

Which is not a real pride. Pride worthy of the name does not rise up against superior strength. It yields as quickly as possible and retires upon itself, proud of what it is and disdainful of what it is not. Your human pride is often only a blind folly. The pride of the gods is clear-sighted. But what need have you to know us, you who have no power over us? Your prayers move us as the song of birds moves you, according to our humor; we find them pleasant or disagreeable and in either case we go on our way, thinking of serious matters, that is to say, of living our own lives. The gods, my friend, are egoists, and if they concern themselves with men, it is from caprice, to vary their pleasures. To speak truly, your joys touch us more than your griefs and, if we had the power, we should more gladly send new happiness to the happy than joys to the unhappy. We have a great contempt for intellectual disorder and unbalanced sensibility; well, unhappiness is produced by these two disorders or by one of them. Whoso

is not master of his nerves and of his heart does not seem to us very worthy of pity. Besides, assistance would be useless to him. For him consolation would be only the brief ray of sunlight which slips between two stormy clouds separated an instant by the wind. And then, we can do nothing. Subject to destiny, as you are, we contemplate the eternal movement of things with eyes which are more discerning but as impotent to alter their course.

Yet I am not pitiless. Physical ill distresses me, and it is precisely that which entirely escapes my power and is without remedy. Life eternally devours itself. Every organism is a prey. The living being is eaten alive. Every animal is a feast and every animal is a guest. A state of health is when he is a feast. The gods do not escape this dilemma; they are organized to be a durable feast, that is all. They resist the attacks of the infinitely little, as a mountain resists an ant-hill. But as time passes, as centuries of centuries go by, the ants get the better of the mountain, while they themselves are destined to perish under invisible bites.

As I have already said, and it pains me, we shall see humanity disappear and with it all the animal species which to-day people the earth. Other forms are being elaborated in the mysteries of eternal matter. The water of the oceans ferments and swells with life about the magnetic poles. What is born rises up indefatigably against what has been born. The pain of living is the obscure sense of feeling oneself die.

But when I see humanity disappear, it is in the manner of the ants and bees and all the animalities which were once intelligent and creative and are now reduced to a mechanical life. You will become like marvellous clocks. Your mathematical complexity will be the admiration of the intelligences which succeed your own. Their multiple and contradictory activity will sometimes halt, struck with surprise at the certainty of your movements and you will be again one of the limits, no longer the same, of the moving problem of intelligence and instinct.

I have also thought sometimes that your earth would return slowly towards primordial unity. Every organism would be reabsorbed into that formless yet living jelly which little by little, in the course of ages, had been differentiated into thousands of dissimilar beings. Movement, having reached its highest pitch, would re-descend. Evolution would continue regressively. The vertebrates would become annelides, the annelides the nothing which grovels like a stain of oil on the surface of the water.

As to the destruction of the solar universe by a cataclysm, it is a theatrical idea, but of a possible theatre. It is both dramatic and vulgar, within the reach of everybody, without philosophic or scientific interest. Anyone can imagine a shock and a burst, as he imagines a fire, a shipwreck or an explosion. If this is the truth, it is without interest. Truth is a bridge we must pass over to reach the other bank of the river.

HE

We have regulated a few great questions according to the logical boldness of our minds . . .

I

Oh! I listen and believe.

HE

An understanding auditor is one half of talk. The solitary plunges and loses himself in the whirl of his arguments. A word, even a look, are sufficient to restore his equilibrium.

I was saying then that we have acted like the philosophers. We have resolved the great metaphysical questions by attacking them at their head, that is to say at the part which is unassailable. To their affirmation of an absolute and at the same time conscious god, we have opposed a simple and categorical denial, as we have a right to do. We could take up the attack from the other side, start from ourselves, seek our cause, find God, then seek the cause of God, and so on to infinity. However large we conceive a number to be, a larger number is always possible. So the nearer we approach this terrible God the further he retires into the depths of the abyss, and the weary intelligence like a hunter who yields to the ruses of his prey, retreats, returns to his house, and thinks of his supper, that is to say, of practical life.

These subtle pastimes give the mind the skill of a con-

juror. They lack neither utility nor pleasantness, but they are pastimes. They may give intoxication but not happiness. Well, happiness is the chief thing. We must be happy. Let us limit ourselves then to asserting that the world is not governed by an intelligence which is infinite and conscious at the same time. For lack of another word, let us stick to the idea of chance, as in the time of my dear Epicurus. No one has discovered anything more beautiful, clearer, or more satisfactory to the mind of a man or the mind of a god. It is equivalent to saying: That which is, is. That simple proposition admits of no objection, it defies every sophism and every artifice.

The idea of God is only the shadow of man projected into infinity. Use this phrase as the supreme refutation and you will find few minds capable of explaining its meaning or even of enjoying its irony.

I do not speak to you of the god of nurse-maids, of naughty children and good working-men. They amuse themselves sometimes by relating my appearance on the earth and in these poor stories I am seen drinking cheap wine, gossiping with house-wives, encouraging strikes, singing the International, disapproving of silk dresses, furs and white gloves. I appear to the marvelling populations as a tipsy nincompoop and a good sort, while at the sight of me civilised men take to their heels, giving way to the rabble. The divine ideal of the priests is not very different and, after all, if I had to choose, perhaps I should enjoy the company of working-men as much as that of seminarists.

But I have never communicated with such humble appetites, and besides I am not God, I am only a god. That is why I laugh at the confusion of catechisms and of pious dreams as well as of revolutionary dreams. I have no power in these matters, but I have never desired either the reign of equality or the reign of holiness. I would rather breathe in your flowers than your souls and your women than your intelligences. Your flowers! Shall I tell you? We have no flowers; we have only the flowers which grow naturally in our uncultivated fields and in our pathless forests! The gods do not labour . . .

(My master picked a magnificent iridescent rose, a rose as beautiful as a woman's face, and remained silent for a long time. I realised that he was thinking. He murmured "Labour; this rose is a labour . . ." In his mind he was comparing it with the frail graces of the eglantine.)

HE

All is contradiction. I would be silent. Those who have created this rose are not those who enjoy it. A salary is not the equivalent of the happiness I experience in breathing it; and I have done nothing but pass and pluck it. Men revolt. How will you prevent them from revolting? They are right.

(He stopped, and gazed without seeing it at the delicious landscape which surrounded us. The touching silence was only disturbed by the murmuring of bees, the shrill cries

of little birds, or the light descent of doves which fell from the trees with the noise of a silk dress.

I was chewing a stem of grass, with a thoughtful air, but I was scarcely thinking of anything.)

HE

They are right. And yet revolt is useless. It is ugly. Happiness is not there. The equilibrium must be found. You do not know how to rest. Just now I was not despising work, I was praising idleness. Take those two ideas, weave them harmoniously together. Your life, though so brief, would be worth ours if you succeeded in uniting those two alternatives. Turn by turn the same people should rest and work. But, to make oneself worthy of leisure! Perhaps more intelligence and courage are needed to know how to do nothing than to know how to work.

The present state cannot last. But do we ever know? Suppose by chance it did last? Then two castes would be formed among men. They exist in outlines; they would then exist in precise lines and violent contours. It would be almost impossible for a slave to become a master. But a master could always become a slave. Your masters of to-day are only slaves who, set free for a moment, will necessarily fall back into the slavery which is their destiny.

You see I am amusing myself with predictions. Yet all I know of the order of things is what appears to everyone's eyes. Do not take my words too seriously. Upon the whole, since men have had laws those laws have not varied.

No doubt from that moment your evolution was completed. Perhaps you cannot modify yourselves further except by exterior means. Hence the necessity for material progress, which is only a grandiose vanity. At the end of the swiftest journeys man and woman find themselves face to face seeking in each others' eyes motives for living, that is to say happiness.

The world has become a narrow cage for you. Yet it is your cage, birds, and you are forbidden to leave it. You may paint it with the tenderest colours; it is a cage and it is your cage. You will go no more to heaven, the stars are fallen. If that heaven which was dreamed of by the infancy of humanity is a paradise, all the places are taken. We have no need of you, and we are perfectly comfortable where we are; we shall never make way for you. And then, at what moment do you expect to make the journey? At your death? When you are dead, it is a little late to travel. Certainly the immortality of the soul was the masterpiece of ecclesiastical ambition. With that truth in his pocket, a man can wander in every country and find servants everywhere. The woman who has lost her lover kisses the impostor's feet when he promises her the renewal of her temporary felicities in the beyond. The priest carelessly presents his shoes. They are the happiest of men for they have come to believe in so productive a fable. How should they deny the beauty and truth of this marvellous tree whose fruits are both gold and love?

The promises of the earthly paradise are no less danger-

ous to human energy. They also teach self-sacrifice and that we should scorn the present hour, advance and labour with our eyes fixed on the future. Priests of religion, priests of politics, all sell very dear the tickets for a lottery which will never be drawn. Do they know it? The merchants of "perhaps" are not necessarily the merchants of lies. Some are the first dupes of the secrets they have inherited and make themselves victims to the vanity of leading a more numerous flock of victims to the sacrifice.

Tradition encourages you to honour the martyr for his faith. The martyr is merely obstinate. He is wrong because he is conquered. The death which threatens him ought to enlighten his understanding.

The wise man has only one belief, himself; the wise man has only one country, life.

Do not think I am teaching you the vulgar egoism of comedies and drinking-songs. Oneself may contain a world. The only solitaries are the brutes. A man's sensibility is a surface whose extent he alone is able to measure. One being often contains several beings. If he does not contain at least two he is neither a human being nor perhaps an animal, but one of the stones of the road under other men's feet. True egoism is a harmony.

But we must compose this harmony ourselves, weave it with our own hands. To receive happiness ready-made would be stretching out one's neck for the rope. Christianity has found an excellent formula: to achieve one's own salvation. That is a personal work. If a method is pro-

posed to you, examine it. If salvation is offered to you already prepared, turn away your head; the food is poisoned.

So I bring you no commandment. I submit to you a system: to live one's own life. What matter to you the movements of the world which do not touch your sensibility? Keep your tears for your own pains and for those which scratch you as you pass; like brambles. The only morality is this: to conquer pain. If it wounds you, be silent and think of your retaliation. Words are snares. Mutual responsibility? Did you feel the prick? No? Then you are not mutually responsible. Do not judge matters of sensibility by the intelligence, and when something is to be understood be insensible to everything which is not reason.

I

But how conquer pain?

HE

Physical pain is a matter for your doctors. . . The remedy for moral pain is self confidence. To consent to pain is accepting the worst of humiliations. To suffer through a woman is to make yourself a woman's slave. But there are moments when it must be sweet not to deny one's pain. It becomes a pleasure.

I

I have known such moments.

HE

There are invincible ills. Then the idea that life has an end will help you to endure the weight. And then, my friend, there is the supreme act frowned at by your resigned morality, the act whose vision gave so much energy to the careless life of the ancients; there is suicide.

Suicide is a monster one should grow used to looking at calmly. Compared with certain physical ills, with certain pains, with certain decays, it should rather appear as a friend, very ugly but cordial. Does it not deserve the softest names? Is it not the consoler? Is it not deliverance?

But one should not play with suicide. Amorous children have made it a gesture as puerile as their souls. This supreme refuge of great pain should not be the remedy for little disappointments. If your morality instead of choosing the nagging part of a jealous old maid had chosen that of an amiable and prudent friend, it would have taught you the art of struggling with destiny and the supreme feint, which is to disappear in smoke when its clasp is cruel and invincible. To have made suicide a cowardice is a singular idea. It is explicable in the order of religious beliefs. It is made for those who do not believe in the survival of souls and especially in future compensation.

Since voluntarily or involuntarily, my friend, death is your fate, at least live. Do not always look down at your feet, but do not look too far before you. To be born, to appear, to disappear; forget the last. Human wisdom is to

live as if we should never die and to pluck the present minute as if it were to be eternal.

HE

The method I have proposed to you is not so bad! I even think that it is the most voluptuous of all those which might guide a wise man's life. If doubt has no longer a place in your intelligence, set it in your acts. Knowing the vanity of everything, of religions, of philosophies and of moralities, submit yourself outwardly to customs, to prejudices, to tradition. Fall into step in rhythm with the public mind.

I

What! Submission?

HE

Do you prefer revolt?

I

I am not a slave.

HE

Very well. Liberty is an interior joy. The less we seek to appear free, the freer we are. A woman is less beautiful when she has divulged her beauty. A man is less free when he makes a parade of his liberty. We must hide our good luck.

My friend, I have told you the philosophy of the gods. Accept its method if you feel you have strength enough to follow it without despair. We exist, and that suffices us. Can you say as much, you who cannot take a step towards

happiness without taking a step towards death? Hope, if you need hope. Drink, if you are thirsty. Do you think I am jesting and that after having treated you as a god, I am treating you as a man, then as a child? No. The truth is that in my mind every question immediately receives all the different and even contradictory solutions which can solve it. Would you believe it? I see with one glance the six sides of a cube! I know that reason is the least reasonable of all things; I know that nothing is crueller than sentiment. There is not one of your systems I cannot run through in two or three thoughts. They are curious ruins; some still attract such a gathering of people that it is forgotten they are ruins. Travel, go on pilgrimages. I have favoured the materialism of Epicurus, the Christianity of Saint Paul, the pantheism of Spinoza. Have I mentioned Spinoza? I loved him very much also. We drank milk as we discovered the identity of reality and of perfection. He was one of the two perfectly happy men I have known; the other was Epicurus. Spinoza found happiness in asceticism; Epicurus in pleasure. They both lived smilingly. I regret them equally. They are two masters for mankind and nearer to men than myself.

I remember one of Spinoza's propositions: "Everyone naturally desires or repels according to the laws of Nature what he considers good or bad." Which means: Everyone naturally desires to be happy. A great naiveté, a great truth; there is no other philosophy, there is no other method. Virtue is being happy.

A VIRGIN HEART

[UN COEUR VIRGINAL]

1907

IT was already hot. They sat down in the shade on the trunk of a tree. Large innocent ants were wandering about on it, but M. Hervart was no longer very much interested in entomology. They looked absent-mindedly at the busy little creatures, crossing and re-crossing their paths.

"Do they know what they are doing?" he thought, "and do I know what I am doing? They are guided by a sensation. And I? They go this way, because they think they have seen or smelled a prey. And I? Oh I should like to run away from my prey. I reason, I deliberate. . . Yes, I deliberate or at least I try to."

He raised his head towards the girl.

Rose was tearing the bells from the spikes of fox-glove and making them burst in the palm of her hand. She was

serious. M. Hervart could look at her without distracting her reverie.

The aggregate was pretty, at once gentle and wild. The features were marked, though still keeping something childish. She was a woman. What a red and voluptuous mouth! M. Hervart was surprised to find himself thinking it would give excellent kisses. And what a fruit to bite, firm and full of juice! Rose heaved a sigh and a large wave swelled her white corsage; the whole young breast seemed to have expanded. M. Hervart had a vision of a roseate whiteness, tender and living; he desired it as a child desires the peach it sees under the long leaves on the wall. He took delight in this desire. He had sometimes dreamed in the same way before Titian's Young Woman. The obstacle was as great. Rose for him was a chimera.

"Never mind," he said to himself, "I have desired her and that is unwise. . . But if I loved her, I should not have had such a vision at this moment. Therefore I do not love her. Fortunately!"

Rose was thinking of nothing. She let herself be looked at. Having been looked at, she smiled very sweetly with just a trace of confusion. Suddenly, as a contrast, she burst into laughter and leaned backwards holding onto the knots of the tree. Her hat fell off, her hair fell loose. She stood up, appearing still wilder. M. Hervart thought she was about to flee, like Galatea; but there was no willow.

"Never mind," she said, as M. Hervart picked up her

hat, "my hair must stay on my shoulders, it is like that. Hairpins will never remain in my hair."

"Hairpins," said M. Hervart, "rarely stay in women's hair."

She smiled without replying and certainly without understanding.

M. Hervart felt that she had smiled a lot that morning.

"But her smile," he thought," is so sweet that I should never get tired of it. Oh, I must tell her that. . ."

"How I love your smile! It is so sweet that I should never get tired of it."

"As sweet as that? That is because it is quite new. It is not my habit to smile."

That was enough to move a man to the depths of his soul. M. Hervart murmured spontaneously:

"It is you I love, Rose."

Without any sign of surprise she replied frankly:

"I too, my dear."

At the same time she shook her dress where one or two lost ants were wandering.

"Luckily they do not bite. They are gentle. . ."

"Like you."

"What a compliment!" he thought, "What insipidity! How ridiculous I am!"

"There is one on your sleeve," said Rose.

She brushed it off.

"Now thank me."

She held out her cheek on which M. Hervart set the most fraternal of kisses.

He thought:

"This is incomprehensible. Yet I think she does not love me. If she did love me she would run away. Love only becomes familiar after the decisive step. . ."

"If we are going to Cherbourg," said Rose, "we must have an early lunch."

They set out, soon left the woods and entered the garden which was nearly as untouched. It was sunny; they passed through it quickly. She walked in front. As they went along M. Hervart gathered a rose and presented it to the girl. Rose took it, picked another and, giving it to M. Hervart, said:

"That is me."

Then she began to run and went up the front steps without turning back.

M. Hervart had to begin his interior discussion all over again. He felt happy, but understood less and less.

"She acts as if she loves me. . ." he thought, "she also acts as if she did not love me. At one point, it is as if I were everything to her. A few steps further on, she treats me as a mere friend of the house. . . And she leads me on. . . I have only seen that in coquettes. . . Where can she have learnt that? . . . Women are like the gentlemen of Molière's time; they know everything without having learned anything. . ."

For an instant they found each other alone on the empty terrace, at the very place where the crisis had begun.

They quickly held hands and Rose put out her cheek. This time M. Hervart did not try to conquer a better kiss. It was not the moment. Perhaps he did not think of it. Rose was disappointed. M. Hervart perceived it. Then he raised the girl's hands to his lips. He liked that caress, for he had a particular cult for the hand. He expressed his secret thought aloud:

"How is it I have not kissed your hands before?"

Pleased but not moved, Rose only smiled. Then suddenly at an idea which passed through her head, the smile changed into an excessive laughter which nevertheless had some trace of confusion. Calming down a little she asked:

"I should like to know. . . to know. . . yes, your name?"

M. Hervart was staggered and did not understand.

"My name? . . . But . . ah! that one . . . the other?"

He hesitated. That name, which he had scarcely heard mentioned since his mother's death, was so unfamiliar to him that he felt ashamed to utter the syllables. He always signed his letters Hervart. All his friends called him Hervart, none of them having known him in the intimacy of the family, and his mistresses themselves had never murmured any other; besides women prefer to use words which apply to anybody, such as darling, dearest, sweetheart.

At last he said:

"Xavier."

Rose seemed satisfied.

She began to eat blackberries, as on the day before. As on the day before, M. Hervart opened his magnifying glass; he counted the black dots which ornamented the red back of a lady-bird, *coccinella septempunctata,* and only found six.

Rose placed a large, ripe blackberry in the palm of her little hand, which was already stained violet, and held it out to M. Hervart. As he did not raise his head, with one eye closed and the other absorbed, she said in a gentle but unaffected voice, a deliciously natural voice:

"Xavier!"

M. Hervart felt a great emotion. He gazed at Rose with surprise and agitated eyes. She was still holding out her hand. He ate the blackberry in a kiss, then repeated several times:

"Rose, Rose. . ."

"How pale you are!" said she, equally moved.

She stepped backward and leaned against the wall. M. Hervart stepped forward. They found themselves eye to eye. Rose waited, very serious. M. Hervart said:

"Rose, I love you."

She hid her face in her hands. M. Hervart dared not speak or move. He gazed at the hands which hid Rose's face.

When she uncovered it, her eyes were moist, her face grave. She said nothing, went and picked a blackberry

as if nothing had happened. But instead of eating it, she threw it away; and instead of returning to M. Hervart, she walked off.

M. Hervart felt frozen. Motionless and sad, he watched her smooth the folds of her dress and settle her hat.

When she reached the lilacs which would hide her, Rose stopped, turned round frankly, threw him a kiss, then, taking to her heels, disappeared in the direction of the house.

The scene had lasted two or three minutes; during that brief interval M. Hervart had lived a great deal. It was the most moving instant of his life; at least he could not then remember that he had ever known one like it. When he heard that name, Xavier, which had almost disappeared from his memory, a train of charming past hours had entered his heart, hours of maternal tenderness, of first avowals, of first caresses. He was back at the beginning of his life and as incapable of gloomy reflections as at twenty.

Suddenly his air changed. He climbed on to the terrace by the strength of his wrists, sat on the edge in the dry grass, lit a cigarette and gazed at things, thinking of nothing.

"Madame Suif," said Lanfranc, "is still very attractive. For instance. . ."

"Rose, my child," interrupted M. des Boys, "I think your mother needs you.'

"Oh! I am certain she does not. Mother would say I was disturbing her."

"Your father is right, Rose," said M. Hervart, happy to make use of his authority.

The girl did not dare to resist her lover's desire, but as she got up she was in an ill humour:

"Already my master!" she thought, "Already! It amused me to listen to this M. Lanfranc . . ."

She did not dare to add:

". . . and to look at that M. Leonor, and to be looked at by him, and still more perhaps to hear Mme. Suif talked of. What was he going to say? Oh! I want to know!"

She went into the house, came out by another door and hid herself in a clump of bushes where she could hear their voices quite well.

"It is not only her shoulders," continued M. Lanfrac, "which are still very tempting. At forty-five, her breasts are still firm and have a good line, her flanks are not excessive . . . Her whole person is a little ample, but she would still make a very honourable Juno at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. I have seen worse on the model stand . . ."

"Often," said M. Hervart, "time has an angelic clemency. It pardons women who have loved much. . ."

"And who still love," said Lanfranc.

"What better exercise than love?" said Leonor, "what sport is more likely to keep the limbs supple?"

M. Hervart gazed with surprise at the dreary young

man who had just shown some wit. Anxious to shine himself, he replied:

"They have not dared to put that in their health-books. But what a pleasant chapter to write in the taste of the First Empire: 'Love, the preserver of Beauty'."

"A pretty subject too for the Prix de Rome," said Lanfranc.

"Seriously," intervened M. des Boys, "I think it is chastity which wrinkles up good women so promptly. . ."

"Oh! those," said Lanfranc, "are the reproducers. When they have made their children, which must be between twenty and thirty, their part is over."

"They can still make the philtres which keep up our youth," said M. des Boys.

They gazed at him questioningly, while he laughed luxuriously.

"You shall see, or rather you shall taste, and you will understand. I wish you all a magician like Mme. de Boys."

"It is true," said M. Hervart, who understood at last, "she has the genius of cooking. The dinners she oversees are masterly."

"You will notice it when you are back in Paris."

"Yes, for I am taking my holidays here," said M. Hervart, pleased by this mark of confidence. He added, to put aside any possible suspicions:

"Holidays from love are not without some melancholy."

Rose had been greatly amused, but after her father had

begun to talk, she ceased to listen. Leonor, satisfied at having been witty, and fearing he might be so no longer, got up and walked in the garden. Rose watched him. The sight of this young animal interested her. Such curious words about love had come out of that head! So love was an exercise like tennis, bicycling or horse-riding! Love was a sport! What a revelation! And the strangest images formed themselves in her mind while her eyes followed the now distant outline of the ingenious and decisive young man.

"How do people play at love, at real love? Xavier teaches me nothing. Yet he knows everything, he knows much more certainly than that Leonor, but he takes care not to teach me. He treats me as a little girl, and makes fun of my innocence. Oh! His mockery is very gentle, for he loves me very much, but all the same he abuses his superiority a little. A sport, a sport. . ."

She left the clump of green bushes and went and sat on an old stone bench in an out-of-the-way corner from which she could watch everything that was going on round about through gaps in the trees. She liked that corner where she had dreamed away whole mornings before M. Hervart's arrival. She now laughed at the childishness of those dreams.

"It seemed to me," she thought, "that the branches would part and disclose a young knight as beautiful as the day. . . Without saying a word, he urged his horse up to me, bent down, lifted me up, placed me on his sad-

dle, and away we went. It was a mad interminable gallop, where I ended up by going to sleep and, in fact, I did wake up as if from a sleep, and yet I had not been to sleep. Nothing happened but a silent ride in the blue air, and yet when I came to myself I was tired. . . How many times I had that dream, how many times I saw the lilac tufts gathered together to make way for my beautiful knight and his black horse . . . the horse was always black. I remember very little of the face of the Perseus who delivered me, for a few hours, from the slavery of my boredom. . . A sport? But that was a sport! What did my Perseus do with his Andromeda? I have never been able to find out. What does a Perseus do with an Andromeda?"

Rose's indefatigable imagination for the hundredth time found new answers to this question. Everything possible rolled itself before her eyes or rolled itself about her body. Not only did she give herself entirely as the dough gives itself to the nimble and violent hands of the kneader, but she became also the woman-baker eager for the male bread. The imagination of a girl who knows and does not know what she desires is as fertile as Aretino's. No movement seems extraordinary to her, no attitude seems indecent, no gesture seems discourteous. She is ready for everything, and everything will seem normal to her. Her appeal to the male is an appeal to knowledge. She wants to know. If she knew, she would no longer imagine. Women only dream of the act which has satisfied them. Girls dream of

every possible act, and all satisfy them equally. The perversion of a girl is the proof of her innocence; but those who would accept every gesture nevertheless know by instinct enough to revolt against the gesture which fertilises; the most wanton are the most careful.

He spoke of his stay at Robinvast, of the pleasure he took in the midst of that rich disordered nature.

"But," he said, "you have come to put order in it. You are going to whiten these walls, scrape down these mosses and ivies, lighten these dark masses, to give M. des Boys a pretty, perfectly new Chateau with a delicious park equally new. . ."

"Touch my ivies!" cried Rose indignantly.

"And why so?" said Leonor. "Are not the ivies the glory of the walls of Tourlaville? Ivy is the only architectural beauty which cannot be bought. At Barnavast, which is in a state of ruin, we respect the ivy every time the wall can be consolidated from within. For me, restoration is giving a monument the aspect which the ages would have given it if its upkeep had been looked after. Restoration is not making anew; it is not giving an old man the hair, beard, complexion and teeth of a young man; it is reviving a dying man and giving him the health and beauty of his age."

"Oh! How glad I am to hear you speak in this way," said Rose. "I hope M. Lanfranc has the same ideas?"

"M. Lanfranc is quite converted to my ideas."

"My father will do nothing without consulting me, but I shall be more certain of getting my way if you are my ally."

"I will be your ally."

"Your method is wise," said M. Hervart. "You know I am the keeper of Greek sculpture in the Louvre? I entered that necropolis at the moment when the old system of restorations began to be abandoned. They were oscillating between two methods: re-making or doing nothing. The second has prevailed. Perhaps you have noticed that our marbles may be divided into two groups: those which have nothing antique about them except the name and those where the material only is antique. Formerly when a bust was found, they gave it a head, arms, legs, and wrote underneath: 'Restored as Artemis, Restored as Minerva, Restored as a Nymph Hunting' according to the caprice of the plasterer or the instructions of a sleepy archeologist. I believe they especially used this method to fill up gaps. If the system had been followed continually, no doubt we should now have a complete Olympus whereas there are still many empty places in the assembly of our gods. Since they have adopted the plan of doing nothing, our galleries have become enriched with curious anatomical fragments, legs and hands which resemble the *ex voto* offerings which were in fact hung up in the Greek sanctuaries, heads which, like that of Orpheus, seem to have been rolled among the pebbles of an indignant sea during storms, busts as full of holes as if they had been used as targets by drunken sol-

diers. In short, we now only obtain fragments of great archeological interest but of practically no art value. Would not an intermediate method have been preferable? Intermediate, that is to say, intelligent. Is not intelligence the art of conciliating ideas and of obtaining a harmony? A head of Aphrodite with a broken nose is no longer the head of Aphrodite. I want beauty and I am given an extract from archives. Let the nose be re-made if I am expected to admire; and if they will not re-make the nose, let the Louvre be separated into two museums, the aesthetic museum and the archeological museum."

"I am going to do a little painting," said M. des Boys.

"I noticed at the end of the garden a beetle which interests me," said M. Hervart.

"I am going up to my room," said Rose.

Five minutes later the two lovers met near the bench where M. Hervart had meditated in vain.

Without saying a word, Rose let herself fall into her lover's arms. Her bowed head disclosed her neck. M. Hervart kissed it with more passion than usual. His mouth pushed aside the collar of her dress, trying to move towards the shoulder.

"Let us sit down," she said at last when she had fully enjoyed the warm caresses of her lover. And taking his head in her turn she covered it with kisses, but chiefly on the eyes and on the eyebrows, on the forehead. Desiring a more tender contact, he took the offensive, held the

charming head which did not resist, sought the lips and, after a slight resistance, conquered them. When they were sitting down there was always a slight struggle to reach that pleasant spot; for when they were walking she often held out her lips frankly.

On the bench it was a more serious matter because it was slower, and also because the kiss more easily irradiated all the parts of her less defended body.

"No, Xavier, no!"

But she allowed him to go on. For the first time M. Hervart, having succeeded in undoing her corsage, slid his hand inside the dress and touched the soft flesh of a breast transported with fear and happiness. Before this he had only held her breast through the dress. It was pleasant but ambiguous. The freedom of the flesh gave much more natural sensations, so natural that Rose after the first flutter, allowed herself to enjoy without remorse the emotions of this new caress. The hand which enclosed her young breast and gently crushed the stiffening point slipped towards the armpit, and this contact, even more carnal no doubt from similitude, completely melted the girl's well-disposed sensibility. Her moist mouth let itself be eaten like a very ripe fruit; when the bite was delayed, she provoked it coaxingly. A double start finally ended the double feast, and they were only two lovers sitting beside each other at once happy and ill satisfied. One was asking herself whether love had no completer feasts, and the other was saying to himself:

"What a pity it is to be an honest man!"

At that moment M. Hervart thought himself very reserved. Later, when he had entirely recovered his calm, he would no doubt feel some scruples, for he was delicate and liable to headaches after indecisive pleasures. At the moment he felt proud of the domination, at least partial, which at ticklish moments he exercised over his inferior nervous centres, by means of a healthy and well-constructed brain.

"After all," he thought, "this is better than digital dreams. This evening in the solitude of a half sleep would she not have found the languour she has felt under my kisses and chaste caresses? The pleasure was slight but it was shared. There were only a few little red cherries on the bough we plucked, but we ate them together fraternally. Love is spiritual and corporal fraternity. Besides, she is my wife. . ."

"You love your husband, little Rose?"

"Oh! yes!"

She roused herself to utter a decisive yes. M. Hervart felt no more indecision. Besides he almost immediately began to give a new turn to his thoughts. He wanted to eat and Rose agreed. As she delayed rising, he wanted to take her in his arms but his unnerved arms were unequal to the light burden. Moreover M. Hervart felt that his legs had no very great solidity. He would have liked to eat and lie in the grass at the same time. He fell back on the bench.

"You look tired," said Rose, who invented every tenderness. "Stay here, I will bring wine and cakes."

But he refused and they went together.

When he was revived by some sherry and a few brioches, M. Hervart wished for some music. Rose, although inexpert, lulled her lover with as many tunes as he wished. She even began to sing. They were ballads.

"The joys of a young married couple," he said to himself, as he dozed a little. "A Greuze picture. We need a little lap-dog and a paternal old man who sheds a few tears through the window, inspired in him by memory at this ravishing spectacle. Ah! I am making fun of myself, so I am not so broken down as might be said. Not so much of a prisoner either. . ."

"Go and see my father," said Rose, breaking off in the middle of a couplet, "I will join you there."

And she went on with her music.

"More and more conjugal," he thought, "for I shall obey her after having, naturally, kissed her on the neck. Dear little girl, she is expecting the surprise, she is already quivering."

Everything happened as M. Hervart had predicted, but there was something more. Rose turned round and, after having held up her lips, said:

"Go, my darling, and above all admire his painting, even more to-day than yesterday."

"Yes, my love."

"How charming it is!" he said to himself, as he knocked

at the studio door, "delicious family complicities! Shall I be able to play this part for long? Shall I declare my intentions to my venerable friend? Obviously I cannot hesitate much longer. Forward!"

Hortense was thirty. She owed her name to the Bonapartist sentiments which in her family had survived for a few years the events of 1870. Until about 1895 the family had also preserved elegant habits of mind and behaviour. Her father, M. d'Urville, had been one of the actors in Octave Feuillet's comedies at this very Compiègne where they were arriving. At the age when young girls forget there are dolls, she had read the complete works of that timid and passionate man; her mother had not forbidden her to turn over the leaves of *La Vie Parisienne*, in which her happy frivolity had seen nothing dangerous for a girl so well brought up. So when she got married Hortense knew that if marriage is a garden surrounded by a wall, there are ladders to climb over the wall and she considered in her husband only rank, fortune and the conventions. Her first lover had been a young officer with whom, as with Leonor, she had lost herself when hunting; only, that had been a stag-hunt; Leonor had only taken part in a shooting party, for owing to the misfortunes of the day, M. de La Mésangerie had given up his hounds. This was a very fugitive love affair. Afterwards she welcomed M. de La Cloche, a momentarily famous deputy; but M. de La Cloche voted on the wrong side, and M. de

La Mésangerie closed his doors to him, in spite of his wife, who under political reasons hid a real but transitory despair. At last, M. Leonor Varin stayed at La Mésangerie to oversee the rather delicate repairs, for the Chateau was a good example of country Louis XIII. In this cold young man, who was nevertheless as romantic as he was sensual, Hortense had found a more durable love which greatly increased her happiness. Under a very carefully calculated reserve, she adored Leonor, who had always shown himself obedient, respectful, dextrous and tender. She felt that the furtive joys she could give him without compromising herself would not wholly satisfy her lover. She too, in whom the eager sensuality of the thirties was awakened, desired less rapid and more complicated pastimes. Leonor's kisses and whisperings had gradually sketched in her imagination images she wished to see in life itself. How often had she thought of an escapade! Two days in Paris! And now her husband himself had given her the two days!

As she said," I am glad!" she admitted to herself a happiness which still seemed to her impossible to believe altogether. She pressed herself against Leonor:

"Is it true? Are we really here alone and free?"

She added in lower tones, while her breasts rose and fell rapidly:

"How I shall be yours, really yours at last!"

"All, all?" asked Leonor, touching her mouth with his mouth.

"I belong to you."

Then she had the wisdom to move back and ask as she leaned toward the window:

"Where are we?"

"We are approaching our happiness," said Leonor.

After the calm gentle Oise came the first houses of Compiègne, and soon the halt. They were moved.

She would not go to the Hotel de La Cloche. A carriage soon took them to the Corne-de-Cerf. Leonor would have sent it away, but Hortense, wiser than her lover, retained it for a drive in the forest. She was pitiless, and, laughing a passionate laugh, made her toilet and came down stairs again.

Without seeing it, they passed the Town Hall, that elegant stone box, then skirting the Grand Parc, they went by way of the Carrefour du Renard to the Monts du Tremble, where the oaks and chestnut trees rise like ships' sails above the green ocean of heaths. They got down from their carriage and for a moment wandered into the sea of bitter scents. The young woman's white dress and golden hair left a luminous track in it as she fled, for she fled like a laughing fauness before the harsh laughter of the faun.

"It was full time," she said, when the carriage picked them up to go on to the Beaux Monts.

"It was full time?"

"Yes," she replied, maliciously," I was intoxicated. . . A little more and I should have lain down in the sea of heath to await my destiny. . . But it could not be. . . No, not to-day. . . We will return to it. Would you

like to? We will return to it every year. . . Ah! How much virtue is needed to resist the advice of the forest."

"Virtue," said Leonor," is to know when to put off one's pleasure or one's happiness. . . I should like to see you naked in that odorous sea, nymph, dryad or siren. . ."

"Would you? . . You drive me wild . . ."

He went out, wandered along the sea at Grandcamp, without thinking of anything but the sensations of the moment, which he wanted to be agreeable. He was not one of those who complain when the seashore is bordered by houses, when there are shelters to take refuge in case of rain or wind, drinks to melt the salt in one's throat, food, beds and the movement of a mediocre but sometimes curious humanity. Those little boys who will become such gross males, those little girls destined to be pretentious young ladies and rich middle-class women, what pretty and delicate animality! They are much more amusing than puppies or kittens. He had often reflected on the mystery of intelligence in children. How does it happen that these subtle creatures are so soon transformed into imbeciles? Why is stupidity the flower of these fine graceful plants?

"But," he thought, "is it not the same among animals and especially among the animals nearest to our physiology? The large apes, so intelligent in their infancy, become idiotic and cruel as soon as they reach the age of puberty. It is a cape they have never doubled. Some men succeed; their intelligence escaped shipwreck and they sail

free and smiling over the calm sea. Sperm is an absinthe whose violence only the strong can endure; it poisons the blood of ordinary men. But one needs another word and another principle, for women succumb to this crisis even more surely. Those who were intelligent in their childhood almost always become so again when they have passed the critical age. In both sexes, there are two successive crises: the sexual crisis and the sensual crisis. The first comes at regular dates for the individuals of the same race and the same surroundings. The second generally coincides with the complete termination of growth, with the state of physiological perfection. Sometimes, when the decline begins, a third crisis appears which resembles the first in that it almost always admits of a sentimental state. I am almost certain that Hervart is now going through that crisis; Hortense and I are at the second; Rose is going through the first."

Like many of his contemporaries, Leonor felt a contempt for his profession. He was an architect but wanted to write studies to show that physiology is the basis of all so-called psychic manifestations. He saw the acts called virtuous or vicious as necessitated by the state of the organs, by the arrangement of the nervous system. Nothing so much inclined him to laugh as the claims of frigid women to make a virtue of their chastity, and after so many scientific observations he was surprised at the obstinacy of men in considering the explosions of the organism as voluntary or involuntary. The influence of conscience on men's conduct

seemed to him null. He demonstrated this when at home to one of his friends, an ecclesiastical professor, by means of a clock with weights which ornamented his study.

"What you call conscience," he said, "is the weight which regulates the striking. But I can take it away and the clock will continue to tell the time it no longer strikes."

This friend had confessed to him that his very real chastity was quite involuntary. Women awoke no desire in him. He had made the experiment and with great difficulty had obtained only a disappointing result. The slightness of his means had provoked laughter in the blasée woman who had devoted her talents to him.

"I think," he added, "that most of my colleagues are in the same position. Some, who are more favoured, make use of their faculties in secret; another has a vice, and I know one who is a danger for children. In general we are chaste by nature's own will. For me licentiousness would be a great torment. I am only interested in mathematics."

But Leonor did not mean to succumb to the clasp of the sensual crisis.

"I shall enjoy this momentary disposition," he thought, "but I shall retain a certain critical spirit. I shall compromise neither my physical fortune, nor my intellectual fortune, nor my social fortune. Within these limits I shall give myself up wholly to the madness of the season. Hortense is an admirable violin, I shall be a devoted bow to it. Am I not also a rather happy instrument in her willing hands? O the fools who spend their lives combatting their

passions! And then what? When they see the garden is about to lose its flowers, they go in a melancholy way to breathe the last rose; the wind passes and they find only a bush of leaves and thorns! But henceforth could not I also say: And then what? Perhaps the only delicious thing in life is the constancy of an unconscious love? I know too well that I love Hortense and I know too well why I love her. It is certain that on the day she appears less beautiful to me, I shall turn aside from her. Is variety as valuable as quality? Let me see whether on this shore. . . I must make use of my state of mind, that is to say, the fortunate irritation of my nerves. . ."

On his return he found Rose in the garden. Since their engagement she lived in a perpetual smile. Naively she entered upon her destiny, suspecting no possible obstacle to her happiness. At the same time, from instinctive coquetry no doubt she had become, not more reserved but less eager for their habitual caresses. She spoke much of their future home, seeing already the furniture for their drawing room, which she decided upon from illustrated catalogues, the colour of the carpets and the curtains. The idea of such furnishing filled M. Hervart with despair; he liked old furniture, lucky finds, and shamelessly mingled them with the practical conveniences set up under his direction. This morning he found it even more difficult to endure this housewifely chatter. He was bored.

REMY DE GOURMONT CHEZ LUI

"Do I feel nothing but a carnal love for her?" he asked himself. "What is the use of my getting married if I do not see the wife and the mother in her as well as the mistress? In that case Gratienne would suffice me. Marriage is delicious when one leaves school. Where do you find happier homes than among students? They live on one another, in one another. Promiscuity appears enchanting. They get to know the opposite sex; they complete themselves. Later on so much intimacy is no longer possible; and still later on a man is perfectly content with amorous visits, while waiting for the moment when solitude brings us the only moments of real happiness."

M. Hervart did not bring his meditation to any conclusion and thus the morning passed away, Rose choosing the ideal wall-paper and Xavier secretly philosophising on the troubles of marriage.

After lunch a diabolical idea came to him: why should he not take a decisive advance payment on his conjugal rights? The blood rushed to his head. He gasped a little and he held Rose against him. When they sat down there was first of all the usual ceremony after the slight rebuffs. She allowed her lover's hand to hold her naked breast, to play with the fringes of her armpit, almost, through her dress, her flanks. Their mouths kissed, bit, were crushed, absorbed each other. After a moment of calm, M. Hervart now on his knees took one of Rose's feet in his hand. He caressed the ankle and she allowed him to do so. He

dared further, reached the calf then the knee. Greatly moved, she still did not protest, but only murmured:

"Xavier! No! No!"

She lacked strength to defend herself better. What energy was left to her was concentrated in her knees which she held tightly together.

"Rose! Rose!" murmured M. Hervart in his turn.

The voice was so tenderly sad that the knees were loosened a little, the hand passed.

"Rose! Rose!" The vice opened once again, and the hand went higher.

"Rose! Rose!"

The knees parted entirely, and with a jump the hand reached its goal. The vice now opened and shut rapidly. The hand had every license.

Nothing more happened. M. Hervart did not dare. While he was very uneasily deploring his own virtue, Rose was coaxing him and calling him naughty.

"Curious," he thought," curious how they all naturally have the same vocabulary."

One day Leonor, who was on a ladder, dropped a pocket book from which fell out a mass of papers, odd sketches, receipts, letters and picture post-cards. Rose picked them up, with only the most discreet of glances, when the Chateau de Martinvast caught her eye. Underneath the tower she found M. Hervart's "Tender Kisses". Suddenly, with a rush of blood to her eyes, she turned the card over and

read: "Mademoiselle Gratienne Leboeuf, rue du Havre, Honfleur." She lifted her head, Leonor appeared not to have noticed the incident, and with a swift movement she folded the card and thrust it inside her corsage.

"Monsieur Leonor, you have dropped your pocket book."

Leonor came down from the ladder, thanked her and Rose went off.

When she had gone, he discovered with joy that she had stolen the Chateau de Martinvast, and he went up whistling to his workmen.

When she reached her room Rose sat down trembling.

"I must be wrong," she said to herself. "It is not possible. And how could it be in Leonor's hands?"

She drew the image from its hiding-place, unfolded it quickly and gazed at it tremblingly.

"It is his writing indeed."

She still doubted.

"What is the date?"

She made it out with certainty: "Cherbourg, 31st July, 1903."

"It is the very day we went to the Liais garden, when we went up the tower and I almost fainted with love. . . I was so happy!"

She cried for a long time. She looked at her hands through her tears, turning them over, looking at each of her fingers one after the other. She seemed to be rediscovering them, taking possession of them again.

At last she got up and stamped her foot.

"Well, I don't love him any more, there it is! Goodbye, Monsieur Hervart. You have deceived me, I shall never forgive you. I who had so much confidence in him, I who let myself go so tenderly to his heart!"

She cried again.

"Now I am ashamed. . ."

And she touched her body from head to foot, as if to take possession of that again also. She would have liked to press it, to wring out of it all the caresses, all the kisses which had been insinuated into her skin, which had penetrated her veins, which had roused the sensibilities of her nerves.

In her already perverted innocence, she imagined the caresses of Xavier and that Gratienne. With a jealous eye she followed their fervent caresses; she saw their mouths joined together, their hands clasped, their knees and feet close together. She imagined the woman's nudity and compared it with her own. Was she more beautiful? How is one woman's body more beautiful than the body of another woman? Xavier had liked to caress her breast, to crush it gently under his warm hand. And did he not say, "How beautiful you are"? Had she not allowed more secret contacts and had not the wandering hand remained there with pleasure? A vision against which she struggled in vain showed her Xavier kneeling beside the naked Gratienne and covering her with kisses. Gratienne, serious and half-swooning, consented to make the gesture she had re-

fused and which had annoyed her, and everything ended up in confused kisses where nothing could be distinguished but naked bodies and limbs linked and twined together.

Something hot rose in her throat, her heart contracted; she tried to scream, half stood up, threw out her hands, and fainted.

When she came to herself she felt a great weariness and also a great fear. She looked round her, dreading to discover the reality of the painful vision which had overwhelmed her. Reassured, she breathed again.

"I was dreaming, I was dreaming!"

But suddenly she felt as if a spring had been released in her heart. There was a sharp change in the state of her being. Grief had installed itself under her virgin breast, recently the joy of an amorous hand. She felt it as you feel a pebble in your shoe. It was something material which had insinuated itself into the intimacy of her flesh and which caused her not a pain, but an uneasiness.

At the same time everything she had been accustomed to love appeared without interest to her. She gazed with an indifferent eye at the room where she had dreamed so much, which she had planned, decorated with so much pleasure, so much minute care, which she had spun and woven to sleep in as a chrysalis while she waited the awakening of love. The beautiful trees in the wood which she saw from her window and never without emotion, now seemed insignificant greenery to her; for the first time she noticed their tops were unequal, and felt shocked by this. She heard

hammer-blows; she looked out the window and saw men breaking a piece of granite in two, and for a moment she wondered why.

"Ah! Yes, the repairs. . . What do they matter! Oh! Where are my beautiful solitary hours in the old house emprisoned in its ivies and its rose-trees! And Leonor! Ah! Let him go away! He is the cause, he! But for his clumsiness, I should never have known that woman existed. . . But how did he come to have that in his pocket?"

The idea of a voluntary indiscretion did not occur to her. She had never supposed that Leonor could feel a tender sentiment for her. Besides, no man but Xavier had yet existed in her imagination. On the one side was Xavier; and on the other side were other men.

But she continued to reflect. Love, jealousy, grief sharpened her natural intelligence.

"There were several letters addressed to M. Varin in the pocket book. That is quite natural. But why this card addressed to that woman? Can it be that he knows her too? Probably she gave it to him because of the view of the Chateau de Martinvast. . ."

She could not succeed in reconstructing the adventure of that post-card. There was a mystery in it which she soon gave up trying to solve.

"But I have only to question M. Leonor. How perfectly simple! Yes, but I should have to tell him that I stole the card, for I did steal it! It is not very serious, per-

haps, but how can I dare to speak of it to him, how confess first of all that I was so indelicate as to look at his correspondence? Oh! A post-card, a view! And then I shall tell the truth, for it was by chance that it fell under my eyes, and if the addressed side had been uppermost I should certainly not have turned it over. . ."

What was especially repugnant to her was the necessity for speaking of Gratienne, for Leonor knew that her marriage with M. Hervart was planned. She remained uncertain, and immediately began to suffer again, for while she was deliberating grief had spared her a little.

She was so dejected and so weary that, when the dinner bell rang, she went down without thinking of her toilet, and without washing her eyes which were still red and irritated with tears.

* * *

Women are complex, not more so than men certainly, but with a complexity which men cannot understand. They do not understand themselves, and do not want to, moreover. They feel, and that is quite enough to guide them in life and even to solve difficulties where men are quite incapable. We should act towards them in their own way. We can only join them through sentiment. There is only one way to understand women, and that is to love them.

* * *

However cold a man may wish to be, however much nature may have given him self-control, he is scarcely capable of walking alone with a young woman without trying to

please her. He is equally incapable of preserving sufficient presence of mind to watch himself act and not to make mistakes. But, to please? Can we please by rules, especially a girl? Women are only capable of total impressions. For example, they do not distinguish between wit and intelligence, between ease and strength, between real youth and apparent youth. To please them you must please them entirely and as soon as you please them you become a sacred animal for them.

The ego is a wall which cuts off the view, and the greater the man the higher the wall. Yet there is a certain degree of greatness beyond which a man can always look over the wall of his egotism; but this is very rare.

COLOURS

[COULEURS]

1908

YELLOW

"How beautiful yellow is!"
(Van Gogh)

IT was arranged.

The last time, he had sent her a long kiss, with closed eyes as if in ecstacy, and she had smiled tenderly, lowering her eyelids.

They had never spoken to each other.

She lived there. There were houses, along the river and beside it, bordering the road which went up the hill; there was a windmill, an inn, a wooden shoe shop, and two or three little farms with a shed and a cart dozing in it. You heard a neigh, a waggoner's oath, the crow of a cock, the rush of the water under the wooden bridge.

He lived there too, but further up, behind the trees which closed the horizen. In the evening, when he returned from shooting, he stopped on the bridge, looking at the river, the willows, the grass, the narrow valley where the sun rested a moment before it died out.

It was there he had seen her. She was laying strips of dark linen on the cool grass. He thought to himself that she was the daughter of the weaver whose frame could be heard near the inn, or a servant. At other times she was washing clothes under the great hazel tree whose branches came down level with the water. She hung them on the bushes; then, before returning, she gathered a few nuts or flowers, or threw pebbles in the stream. When she felt she was being gazed at, she laughed, but without allowing herself to be distracted from her task or her amusement.

But one day she remained a long time watching him, eating nuts which she broke between her teeth with the swiftness of a squirrel.

Then he came every day. She was there, or came there slowly, with her head high. They could have spoken, they were silent. He threw her flowers, sprays, she took no notice. He brought her a yellow carnation; she hid it in her corsage and disappeared without a gesture.

Their mute agreement was concluded the next day.

The next day, after the first glance was exchanged, he saw her go into the direction of the wood, and enter the copse. He circled round, met her as she was climbing the bars of an enclosure. Her short skirt lifted. She showed

a white knee. That decided him. This fresh little peasant girl was clean. Desire made him tremble a little.

He took her in his arms, held her, kissed her lips, but she gently freed herself and bending her shoulders slid under the branches.

It was an abandoned sunken road which led to an old quarry; she moved quickly, avoiding the brambles, brushing against the broom, the honeysuckles, the foxgloves which interlaced wildly in that dark hole of sand and stones, which the branches of beech-trees, ashes and oaks protected with their thick green cloak.

She was halted by a bramble which gripped her legs; he caught up with her, knelt down, disengaged the bramble, clasped her legs. But she would not fall yet. She stiffened herself; she turned her back to him. He stood up; his hands rose to the breasts which he held; he kissed her neck; he bit an ear.

Then she turned her head; her eyes were serious; she ceased to struggle. Leaning on the arm which was round her waist, she gave her mouth to kisses, her body to caresses.

They fell gently.

Now seated side by side, they looked at each other out of the corners of their eyes, engaged in similar movements. She was arranging her hair, he was straightening his tie.

She smiled.

He thought.

This piece of good luck enchanted him. He had met few so agreeable in his career as an ambiguous hunter.

"But how difficult it is to move women! The transports of this amorous creature were very slight. She seemed more ashamed than tender, or more decided than abandoned, I do not know which."

He, however, had been very happy, and what a soft peace he was now enjoying! What a charm in this young body, in those outlines which still have their first shape, in those naive organs!

"She is as smooth as the trunk of a beech and her flesh yielded with so much pride, but with so much simplicity too! How simple love is!"

He looked at the girl, trying to find something to say, but he was not used to speaking, especially to speaking tenderly.

She seemed still prettier to him now, more natural. He had never before had that feeling of naturalness. Perhaps the silence made his reflect.

He spoke at last, about the charm of the moment, the coolness of this cave, his happiness, his feeling of repose.

She awkwardly smoothed her skirt, twisted a fox-glove spike in her fingers, smiled, but showed no pleasure.

"It seems to me I should almost like it if she cajoled me."

He looked for his pipe, went to the wrong pocket, and touched his purse.

"Ah!"

He secretly took out a piece of gold, held the girl's hand, and closed her fingers on the surprise. She opened them at once, looked at it, blushed; her breast heaved, she gave a deep sigh, then fell into her lover's arms, shaking with nervous sobs of joy.

Kneeling beside him, she kissed his eyes, his cheeks, his beard, the corner of his mouth. She was happy.

ROSE

". . . and the roses too high!"
(H. de Régnier)

He was a child. He was no longer dressed as a little boy, but not yet as a man. His face was smooth, his hair curly; you could see him grow; he played marbles when they were in season, and made fun of girls all through the year.

But he did not make fun of Christiane, because Christiane was ten years older than he was, because she seemed a grown-up lady like his mother, a younger lady without a husband. On the contrary, he loved her, because she was kind, coaxing and laughing. Life is something which must laugh, little boys think, and when people do not laugh, they are not alive.

All Christiane's girl friends were married here and there. She went to see them, hoping here or there to find a husband in her turn, but she had no dowry and it was difficult. She often came to the little boy's mother, because their houses were next door and also because the little boy's father, who collected engravings, was frequently visited

by rich collectors to whom he liked to show his cabinet. Who knows? It was her expression. She repeated it constantly, with confidence in the future. Christiane was twenty-five. In the summer Christiane's friends gathered at a small watering-place in Brittany and she who had the largest house invited Christiane, whose old and ailing parents preferred not to stir. It was a very gay assembly of childhood and youth. There the little boy became even more amphibious; he did not know which of his instincts to obey. It was very tempting to build pebble forts against the rising sea; it was also very tempting to read near the young women who were sewing and near Christiane who was embroidering. So he shared himself and when he thought he had been the serious young man long enough he ran off to the little ones, and puddled joyously in the foam-moist sand.

Time went on thus for a few days, when the collector of engravings received a mysterious letter: "Sir, your departure which I learned when I called on you last Thursday, thwarted a plan which I have been thinking of for some time. A certain impatience forbids me to await your return. Should I be indiscreet if I allowed myself to disturb you for a few moments by the sea-side, whither you have fled for the very reason of escaping indiscreet persons? . ." The signature "Durand, de l'Institut," recalled to the collector of engravings a visitor whom he had received two or three times and who had appeared absent-minded at his last visit. He also recalled that Christiane

had been with him the first day, that he had greeted her with a great deal of deference, that he had spoken gently to her, that he had abandoned a portfolio of rare engravings for her.

Christiane had conquered a husband. No one doubted it when they saw M. Durand install himself at the Hotel de la Plage and, declaring that he should finish his holiday there, mingled gravely with the young women's frivolous conversations. The little boy had detested him from the first day. He thought:

"He is not a collector of engravings, he is a collector of Christiane."

This thought often occurred to him and he let it escape aloud before his mother, who scolded him very hard, while wanting to laugh. Soon everyone called M. Durand "the collector of Christiane" and the nickame remained with him for the rest of his life.

This was the sole allusion to a marriage which was decided upon in silence. Towards the end of the month when everybody by common accord was talking of the preparations for returning, M. Durand took the collector of engravings aside and said to him:

"I am going away. My mind is made up. I am certainly 'the collector of Christiane'."

"Ah! So you heard?"

"Yes, and with joy. It proves I have been understood."

"But she?"

"I do not dare."

The collector of engravings took it upon himself to place Christiane's hand in that of M. Durand. Christiane pretended to be surprised, M. Durand blushed as he kissed the obedient little hand and Christiane realized that this man loved her and desired her happiness. The thought made her happy already.

Christiane tore herself away from the compliments and kisses of her friends. She went up to her room and, sitting by the window, contemplated the sea which she naively thought was like the infinity of her life.

She dreamed on a moment, when a noise made her turn her head; she listened. It sounded like sobs. She got up and looked. Kneeling beside the bed and half-hidden by the falling curtain, the little boy was crying, with his head among the clothes.

Christiane approached and, taking the child by his shoulders lifted him up and drew him towards her:

"What is the matter, my dear?"

"Christiane! Christiane!"

"What?"

"Oh! Christiane!"

"Come, sit down beside me and tell me what is the matter!"

She had sat down on the bed, quite touched by this great distress. When the little boy was beside her with his head leaning against her shoulder, she went on:

"Have you been scolded?"

"No."

"Are you in pain?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

"Come now," she said a little sharply, "be reasonable, speak."

"Oh! Christiane, you scold me, you whom I love so much!"

Then Christiane understood, and the child frightened her. But his words had also moved her and, to make up for her sharpness she pressed him against her breast.

"Christiane, is he going to take you away?"

"No, no, I shall stay with you all, with you."

"It isn't true!"

"But it is, I assure you. I shall come to see you as usual, and I shall always love you, little one."

"I love you so much!"

Innocent and curious hands held Christiane and pressed her flesh. She gazed with confusion into the languid eyes which sought her eyes. She looked at the young mouth also, and the young mouth rose towards hers and held it. They remained thus for a long time. They lay back on the bed. The little boy opened his eyes and instinct threw him on Christiane. He opened her corsage, caressed her soft flesh, thrust his hand under her shoulders. Christiane started, raised herself up, then seeing herself unbuttoned said suddenly:

"Yes, little one, kiss my heart. There. Give me my first kiss of love!"

And the little boy, holding Christiane's swelling breast with his hands set his happy lips on the pale rose which budded, ready to open.

She gave a cry, as if bitten, started up, readjusted her clothes and said:

"Well, I am glad. Tender little friend, I shall always love you. Keep the taste of my heart. Who knows?"

MAUVE

Pauline spent a very agreeable half-hour in the confessional-box. As she detached the heavy fruits of sin, the lightened tree raised its branches, regained its spring attitude.

"It is a little like when Amelie washes my head," she thought. "As the cool waves flow over me, I seem to become lighter, freed from a heavy veil, from the crape of care."

As she thought that she was ashamed, for she ought to have been entirely given up to contrition and to participate with feelings of repentence in the priest's indulgent words.

"But it is like that!" she went on to herself, "and then, this sensation of comfort I feel is surely itself the proof of the action of the sacrament on the sinner!"

She had related gently, without boasting but without reticences, her whole life during the last two years.

"I have sinned against chastity."

"Well. By yourself?"

"No."

"With your husband?"

"Oh no!"

"Well. Go on."

"I have sinned in thought, in word and in deed."

"A habitual lover? One? Several?"

"One."

"Well. You ardently desire to see your accomplice, to kiss him, to give yourself to him?"

"Yes."

"Often?"

"Always."

"Well. And when you are together you exchange unclean remarks?"

"Oh no!"

"Unclean remarks, that is to say, tender words?"

"Yes."

"Well. And then, caresses? Normal?"

". . ."

"He kissed you all over your body?"

"Yes."

"For a long time?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"I too."

"And in this way you reached pleasure?"

"Sometimes."

"Well. It is very serious. Was it with your own consent, or were you compelled?"

"Oh!"

"Of your own consent?"

"Yes."

"This is dreadful. You deserve hell-fire."

"Father, I repent deeply, deeply."

"Well. Go on. No other habitual attempts to avoid procreations?"

". . ."

"You satisfied your passion without thinking of anything else, like the beasts, according to the words of the apostle St. Paul?"

". . ."

"You mingled your flesh at hazard, with no object but bestial pleasure?"

"Oh!"

"Without ever a return upon yourself, a regret, a thought for the teaching of Holy Church?"

"Alas!"

"Without shame?"

"I am ashamed now."

"Well. Go on. You were naked, quite naked?"

"Yes."

"Without blushing?"

"Alas!"

"You were like a demon."

"Oh!"

"Only demons do not blush at their nudity!"

"I blush at it now."

"Did you yield to the temptation of a too ardent temperament?"

". . ."

"To passion then?"

"Yes, I was in love."

"You should have gone to the sacraments, to exercises of piety."

"I am doing it now."

"How did he take you?"

"I don't know. By looks, by smiles, by words. . ."

"Did you struggle?"

"I loved him."

"Is it over?"

"Yes."

"You will never see him again?"

"Never."

"Well. Go on."

And they went over the other sins, gluttony, idleness, lying, and Pauline remembered the delicate food after furious meals of love, siestas in her lover's arms, the complicated stories she invented to throw her husband's curiosity off the scent. A dream! For it was only a dream! A dream! She cried.

"Since your repentance is real, I shall give you absolution, which it might have been preferable to delay perhaps, but tears wash out many things. Ask pardon from the

depths of your heart of God whom you have offended so grievously."

Her emotion redoubled as the Latin words fell one by one on her gold hair, through a delightful mauve hat, matching her dress which was of the same colour but lighter.

When the ceremony was over she saluted with no embarrassment the priest who was known to her. They talked a moment of the last charity sale, whose results had been marvellous, and the poor man could not help gazing, without covetousness certainly, but with a certain amazed complacence, at this elegant, pretty, fine young woman, who doubtless knew all the secrets of lust better than the most crafty casuists.

"Woman! Woman! She has two little children as pretty as angels and takes them to mass and catechism herself. Her husband preaches the holy war and her lover has left her for Mme. de Ruel who says loudly: 'I am fanatical about God!' Woman! Woman!"

Pauline as she got back in her carriage, thought of the delicious orchids which a hand she thought she could guess had sent her that very morning.

"Now I am pure, without a spot, what happiness! There was one orchid, with a little rosy cork-screw tail which is a love! It must be he, it must be he. Six o'clock already! I hope I don't miss him! Good heavens! How beautiful religion is! I am happy!"

ORANGE

When the Captain entered the little room where she was working with her mother, Berthe felt as if she were stunned. She had to hold her heart to stand up. She fell back on her chair and bent her head. As she pretended to fold up her work, she shivered happily.

Her mother abounded in graciousness and in useless vulgar words:

"They had not expected him so soon. They would have liked to dress and receive him in the drawing room. They would have put some flowers in the vases on the mantel, since that is the Paris fashion. And above all they would have asked M. Bernard to be there, for nothing intimidates poor women so much as a brilliant officer."

She was very much afraid. The batman, who had come on ahead in the afternoon to see the room and undo the valise, had not given the old servant a very advantageous idea of the Captain.

"He's a rough man," he had said, "twice as big as me and he eats like a devil."

"Lord Jesus, can it be possible! We'll make a good dinner and a good bed for the good gentleman."

"He isn't a good gentleman, he's hard as leather. He'll be here at six o'clock. Now, salutes to the company. Dismiss."

"But you'll drink a glass all the same, won't you, Mr. Soldier?"

"All the same."

And as he drank, the soldier had given a more precise idea of his Captain: a fine brute!

At these repeated remarks, the whole house had trembled, but not Berthe. M. Bernard had gone to invite the school-master, a prudent man, for dinner, so as not to be face to face alone with so formidable a person.

"We'll make him a little drunk," he had decided, "that will be the way to get the best of him!"

Mme. Bernard for her part said:

"I shall spoil him. There is nothing like sweets to wheedle a man."

Berthe had thought too. She had thought:

"So here is a man! At last I shall see a man. Ah! What a long time! . . . perhaps he will hurt me? Perhaps! Perhaps!"

And she had absolutely insisted on working at her embroidery as usual, in order not to seem disturbed:

"Are we going to look like people who never receive anybody?"

And, as she drew her needle she repeated to herself:

"Has my hour come at last, the definitive hour?"

They talked of the manoeuvres, of the country, of its coolness, the grass, the trees. The officer sketched out country pictures, boasted the charm of the little river under the willows, regretted that he had been obliged to allow his men to trample down the corner of a green meadow filled with kingcups.

Berthe looked at him in surprise, disappointed in so

much gentleness. Then he accentuated his admiration by slapping his knee and exclaiming:

"Damn it! A pretty little nook! There was a girl who went on beating her washing and got up from time to time to spread a piece on a polled willow. Pouf! if I'd been alone!"

Berthe felt happy again and thought:

"If he had been alone with her, terrible things would have happened, obviously. Oh! If I could be alone with him!"

As the officer was praising the garden, which he had seen when he came in, Berthe spoke for the first time:

"It is very simple, but if you would like to see it . . . ?"

"Ah yes," said the mother, "and you can cut a few flowers. I will join you in a moment."

At the first rose tree the Captain wanted to take the scissors:

"I will cut whichever ones you tell me. I should not like to have you cut your fingers before me."

"No, no, do you think I am so clumsy?"

She pretended to struggle, while she let him take the scissors. He opened her fingers gently.

"A good omen," he said. "To have touched so pretty a hand makes one wish to touch the heart."

She did not reply, thinking:

"It's all going to be insipid again."

Then she became aggressive. As the Captain held out a rose with his scratched hand:

"Blood? Don't let any fall on my flowers, at least."

"But blood is beautiful."

"No, it is dirty."

"I do not think that has ever been said to an officer who has had his head half split with a sabre."

She looked at him.

"He really seems very angry," she thought. "If he dared, he would beat me. What shall I say to excite him more?"

She thought of nothing and there was a long silence.

"Another one," she thought, "who is master of his emotions. I was deceived, he will not attack me. Ah! How weary I am!"

"Upon the whole," said the Captain to himself, "she has insulted me. She is only a woman, so be it. Nevertheless she has insulted me. I must have some reparation."

The Captain looked round him. They were in a lonely place, surrounded with clumps of bushes.

"The basket is full, I think," he said, "here are the scissors."

And, as she held out her fingers, a little uneasy in spite of her resolutions at the changed attitude of the man she was observing, she felt two hands settle on her shoulders and immediately a mouth crushed against her own.

His gesture of vengeance, of ironical vengeance, ended, the Captain was leaving her shoulders and about to step back when he felt his rough kiss returned with passion. From the shoulder one of his hands moved down to the plump breast; the other arm was round the yielding waist.

An eminently classic pose whose results, not far from a bed of verdure, are clumsinesses in lifting a skirt caught underneath a collapsed body. Most often the tender victim, who has not lost the sense of folds, must come delicately to the brute's aid.

"Yes, yes . . ." murmured Berthe.

But a voice called from the house:

"Berthe, Berthe!"

Stiffening herself, she said:

"We have the night. I will come. Meanwhile, silence, coldness or insipid gallantry."

To the great astonishment of his hosts, the officer ate and drank moderately. He only smoked two cigarettes but accepted a lot of coffee. During the whole evening his attention was concentrated upon guessing the topics of conversation which might set free the eloquence of his partners. He was fortunate enough to find them. While they were talking he reflected:

"Virgin? A lover? Lovers? Innocence? Perversity? Curiosity? Stupidity? In any case, it is serious. First my conscience? Then marriage? I shall push the bolt."

The moment after the male thought of the beautiful girl who was giving herself:

"Why these scruples? What, not pluck the flower beside the way?"

Then:

"If I do not take her, I shall regret it for two years, perhaps for all my life."

He gazed at her without affectation while she was pouring out a cup of tea and dared to say:

"Oh! Not so much, it is very strong, it will keep me from sleeping."

Her only reply was to raise her head, look at him and then lower her eyelids.

He felt his head turning. Of course, this was not his first piece of good luck, but he had not yet had any of this quality. Decidedly, this young middle-class woman of the country exalted him to the highest point. What was this red-haired sphinx. He scented her nudity beforehand and trembled. He saw her all white, like the marble statues he had desired rather than admired.

"You will sleep in the orange room," said Mme. Bernard, who was beginning to nod off to sleep. "A caprice of my daughter's, she would have it all that colour. But you have seen it already. I hope you will sleep well."

The last remark was excruciating to the officer. This maternal intervention threw him back into his indecision.

Berthe probably guessed the bad impression, for she added:

"Orange is my colour. It seems to me I am less ugly in the midst of that flame, where I melt. Nobody ever sleeps in that room, but I often retire to it. It is my domain."

"And what do you suppose she does there?" replied Mme. Bernard. "She reads, she dreams, for she is a bit of a dreamer. But then, these girls! I was just like her at her age, but I preferred blue."

"Orange is a beautiful colour too."

"Say it is the most beautiful," said Berthe.

"It is the most beautiful," said the officer.

Now he was waiting. After having made his toilet, he had half dressed again, and was smoking a cigarette as he sketched arabesques on the edge of a newspaper. He was thinking of nothing. Only his heart stopped beating at every sound, at the sound of an awakened fly.

Every ten seconds he looked at the door. He got up and placed his ear against it.

At that moment a panel of tapestry near the chimney seemed to come unstuck.

"Am I dreaming?"

He went towards the mystery and got there in time to receive Berthe in his arms.

"My room is there," she explained after having accepted and received the kiss of greeting, "it is simply a double cupboard whose back I have succeeded in making mobile. How often in the last three years have I come to see whether you were there! No one, no one, never any one! But at last you are here. Will you love me?"

Seeing that these words surprised her lover, she went on:

"He who comes is he whom one awaits. You came and I am yours."

Moving very gently, speaking very quietly, they reached the edge of the bed and sat down on it. As he held her against him, the Captain felt under the thin gown the

girl's corporal beauty. He was greatly moved, but had the courage to say:

"No, you are a mad child and I shall not take advantage of you. If you want to love me, we have the whole of life. Imprudently and innocently you said 'we have the night'. I say 'we have life'."

She let her head fall on the officer's breast, tightening hard the arm she had passed round his neck. Then she raised herself, her red head, with the mad burning eyes, found his lips which she bit, and fell backwards dragging with her the man, who entered.

Later, as she curled in her lover's lap, she said:

"Should we ever have found another moment like this?"

Two months later the orange room was their wedding room.

They were very happy and often talked of their adventure, but I think Berthe never confessed to her husband that he was the third Captain for whom she had pierced the wall.

LETTERS FROM A SATYR

[LETTRES D'UN SATYRE]

1913

MY story is a very long and obscure one, but two episodes strangely ennoble it. I was born in Phrygia from the loves of Hermes and an elegant Dryad, whom I loved very much because she was tender and pretty. However, she had strong passions and the shepherds no less than the gods, attracted but did not hold her caprice. I grew up, I exercised my curiosity at hazard and I found inquisitive girls at every ford and in every path. Dionysus, whom you call Bacchus, took me in his train and under torrid skies I knew women more melting than your grapes and more lascivious than your goats. At my return I travelled into Greece, but men were already beginning to make war on each other, they shut up their wives and put fences round their fields. The age of gold was over:

"Do you not regret the time when heaven on earth walked and breathed in a nation of gods?"

I regret it so much and so often that I retain an invincible melancholy. As the great gods no longer came down to an earth sullied by war, property, gold and the human laws which translate so ill the gentle divine laws, we remain the only immortals whom a shepherd could meet on his path in the twilight. We were beloved and feared too. They gave us milk, cakes and honey, which was pleasant. But more than once a churlish peasant pursued me with a pitchfolk until I had to fly for shelter to the woods. I am peaceable and vulnerable, I am a god, but a lout could easily lame me. They say the age of gold will return. Let us hope so.

Do not imagine ancient Greece as a country of easy triumphs with women. Love was only esteemed there in a form which is always repulsive to me. Few joys: an escaped slave, a peasant woman in rut. If I had not had the nymphs, my sisters, I should have died of boredom; but the nymphs are less varied than women, although prettier, and their pride is terrible. The disgusting teaching of a certain Socrates, the motley apostle of pederasty and virtue, the enemy of women and the gods, hastened my flight. I went to Italy where I rediscovered a certain state of nature and human manners. In order to surprise no one, I called myself Faunus like my Italian brothers.

I spent the happiest part of my life in Italy. There I found the graces of Asia, with less indolence, a great deal of curiosity, both erotic and passionate, and that delicious precosity which makes young flowers in their innocent

ardour come before the spring and break their corselet at the first glance of the sun. I spent seasons worthy of Apollo. My snubnose gleamed in the loveliest eyes, and the coolest legs shivered under my hot goat legs. The repeated sound of my hoofs on the rocky hill-sides awoke the desires still sleeping in the bosoms of Latin virgins. Forgive my emotions at these dazzling memories. I still have days, I scarcely ever have seasons, and my eternal youth is often forced to live on the past; the era of gleaning has long since succeeded the era of abundance. In those times you must know I fled as often perhaps as I pursued. I was weary of loving, weary of opening new ways. For a moment I thought of camping in one of my clearings. I nearly settled down in a home. The home of Faunus, you can see the amusing little comic drama! Alas! I did not have the time.

One day we saw we were surrounded by a troup of peasants armed with pointed sticks as if to hunt wild boars. They were led by a kind of sorceror, with a Welsh headdress, who waved in the air a piece of wood forked like a gallows; with the other hand he dipped a branch of boxwood in a leather bottle carried by a slave and sprinkled nature. I should have laughed if I had not had a presentiment of danger. My companion had gone off to gather herbs.

"They have come to find her," I said to myself. "They will not do her any harm. But if they catch me look out for the boar spears!"

I took to my heels and, crossing a precicipe, I was soon out of reach. I was not able to re-cross that precipice for nearly twelve hundred years.

What centuries! I lived among wild goats and the most I could do from time to time was to snare a peasant woman, who found nothing to complain of. One of them informed me that I was no longer called Faunus but Diabolo, and that I was considered as the enemy of the human race, who had caused man to fall into sin. I was supposed to have seduced a woman in the shape of a serpent. I reflected that men had become as foolish as they already were malevolent, and I thought mournfully of my sad immortality. However, as the woman pulled my beard, and kissed my snubnose and moist lips as she called me a monster, I concluded the madness was mitigated and left a little hope, at least, in one half of humanity.

One day I was awakened by the noise of a hunt. They were blowing into sea-shells which made a noise like those of my marine brothers, the Tritons. The hounds tore the air with raucous violent noises. The gallop of the horses beat on the hard earth like a verse of Virgil. (O the time when the shepherds repeated to each other the songs of the Mantuan swain!) Grown bolder recently, I was dreaming in the heather, and pursuing grasshoppers and lizards. The hunt came near, I had only time to leap on a rock; and, as I was watching the sight before climbing higher

and disappearing, I heard a clear voice cry with an accent of surprise and joy:

"Ecco il Fauno!"

I was very glad too, for, when my beautiful name as a Roman god was returned to me, I felt that better times had arrived. Greatly moved I lay down on the thyme warm with the kisses of the sun. The evening was falling, I was dreaming, when the same clear voice sounded once more in my ears:

"Fauno! Fauno!"

Their hairy tips stood up, like the whole of my pelt. I stood erect, with thighs braced.

"Fauno! Fauno!"

In a few bounds I reached the clear voice. It was a beautiful young woman. In order to run better, she had loosened her corsage and the wind had unknotted her hair. She fell wildly into my arms, while I raised my thought towards the master of the gods and murmured:

"Then beauty has returned to the earth? O Jupiter, thou hast not forgotten thy children!"

For two days and two nights I had loved the beautiful young woman who had come to me crying:

"Fauno! Fauno!"

It was late afternoon; the sun shone hot and its rays, passing through the pines, illuminated the earth, every blade of grass, every flower. My love was asleep, and to keep away the buzzing flies, for she was naked, I had thrown over her her large unfolded scarf. But from time

to time unable to resist my desire, so beautiful was she, I lifted a corner of the veil and watched her sleeping. Suddenly I realised with fear that we were not alone. Someone was watching us, hidden in the bushes. I rushed toward the enemy; and a man stood up. I hurled myself at him, bristling with jealousy, when he made a friendly and imperious sign to me.

"Do you understand the language of men?" he said. "Then, know I have not come to fight you. I am wandering in search of beautiful things. I am seeking nature, and I seem to have found it. I was gazing at it. Are you a beast, are you a god?"

"I am a god."

"Then it is true," murmured the young man, "that such beings exist! And she?"

"She? She is a woman, but as beautiful as my mother who was a goddess. I was born in Phrygia, in the days when the gods were as numerous on earth as men."

"Let me make the portrait of you and the divine woman resting at our feet."

From his doublet he drew a note-book and pencil. I agreed to his fantasy, when my love awoke. Half raised on her arm, she said:

"Signor Allegri, I hope you will not betray me?"

"Ah! It is La Fosca. I did not know you were so beautiful, dark beauty!"

"And to-day luminous, am I not? But turn away your head a moment for it would be improper to let you see the

movements of my body. When I am asleep I am a marble; but when I move I am a woman. Now I mean to get dressed to honour your presence and to offer you the fruits of our woods and the water of our spring."

"Have you fled human beings for ever?"

"Perhaps. Only the gods know how to love, and I have found a god."

"A marvellous adventure," said Allegri, "but if you put on a dress, two suns will set at the same moment."

"You will see me again, if you return here, for my god is not jealous. How could he be, for he surpasses men in potency nearly as much as an oak surpasses the ivy."

My smile made my mouth so large that Allegri went on:

"He is indeed a faun. He is like the faun made not long ago by Signor Buonarroti to amuse our holy Giulio."

While Allegri traced on the page a figure in which I recognised myself, Fosca got up and, draped in her scarf, went away. I went to get water in a buffalo-horn, while Fosca collected some fruit, mulberries, apples and pine-nuts, and we had a pleasant meal.

Allegri returned several times in the following days. He drew on pieces of paper with pencils of different colours. As soon as he arrived Fosca lay down naked in the pose you know, and I had the happiness to remain there, holding the veil I had just lifted off in an attitude of desire which was not feigned. This comedy annoyed me a little. I thought the sittings were too long. And then Fosca smiled too hap-

pily in her pretended sleep, her body and breasts rose and fell with too much complaisance.

One night when we had remained talking and laughing very late (he had brought preserved fruits and a flagon of wine), the sky began to grow pale.

"It is time," said Allegri, standing up. "Come, in an hour we can reach the solitary barn I have made my studio. My picture is finished, but I should like to compare it with reality, if only once, for the memory of my eyes may have deceived me, although they are very faithful mirrors."

We followed him. The work was perfect. Fosca truly breathed, and I was truly beautiful, with my amorous look. The skins of beasts awaited Fosca, and she lay naked on them, while Allegri with his eyes at once on the model and on the picture feverishly added new touches to his work, each one of which miraculously gave more relief, glow and life to the picture. At that moment he was the real god.

"I hear the peasants," he suddenly exclaimed. "Save yourself, I will bring her back to you this evening."

I fled, for I have a great fear of pitchforks. I never saw Fosca again. Her loss was only painful to me for the first few days, for I had felt she loved me less since she had yielded herself to Allegri's admiration and besides, I had enjoyed so many pleasures from her that satiety was approaching.

LETTERS TO THE AMAZON

[LETTRES A L'AMAZONE]

1914

I DO not think I am a man of conversations, I discover the right answer at the wrong moment, and thanks to this disposition I have most often to take refuge in silence.

When we remember a sensation, it is the memory of a memory, the sensation itself has fled. The water has left the river-bed dry; it is no longer even damp; it is filled with the wild plants which haunt dried-up ground. The intelligence may assert that water once flowed there, but the reconstruction of the image does not bring back a renewal of the sensation. The sensation is dead.

To forget is necessary. What a burden the voluntary evocation of our old love sensations would be to us, if we

had that power! The past would mingle with the present so much that it would be wiped out, and we should be incapable of giving ourselves up wholly to the seductions of the immediate. Far from being augmented, our life would be shortened and as it were limited. To allow the full exercises of our senses, the old pleasures must be effaced or hardened, and leave in us only the idea of an uncertain state, which can be perceived solely by the intelligence. In our hours of meditation we may suffer sometimes because we cannot reconstitute these reminiscences in their plenitude, but how much more we should suffer if these phantoms returned to life! Forgetfulness of the past is a condition of strength, of aptitude for the present. It is our incapacity to reawaken it wholly which urges us to new experiments wherein we always hope to find ourselves as we were at first, and this search directs our lives and never leaves us satisfied. You know the charm of beginning, and what rejuvenation it brings the soul. For there to be a beginning, there must have been a forgetting, not a total forgetting, of course, for then we should no longer be ourselves, but sufficiently complete for the sensation to seem new and almost untried to us.

Many loves must be killed to reach love.

Meditation for the New Year

Depart from your egoism at this first hour of the year, O heart made dry by the summers of life; think with joy of what is not yourself, think of the bodies which are the

honour of the world, of the purity of mingled curves, of the transparency of outlines, of the suppleness of ligatures;

Think of the beautiful women who have lovers, think of the dignity of their flesh made sacred by pleasure, think of the movements of their fingers towards the desire they covet, of the heavings of their breasts, of the quiverings of their nerves;

Think of their serious heads and joyous feet, the moisture of their lips and the light of their eyes, their open gestures, their arms which close on love;

Think of beautiful women and do not desire them. Raise your heart above your beauty, rejoice that they are glad with their lovers and, if they lose breath on the way, charitably extend to them a spiritual hand;

Think of deserted women, be the procuror, the invisible friend, bring together the dis-united and breathe into their ears the words which bind and re-bind the bodies; match lovers, form new couples, be the universal accomplice;

Think also of the ugly, of the evil, of those who never had lovers, of those who have dreamed from their youth up of a near body to enchant their hands clenched by solitude, of those who never felt the glances which pierce the flesh like a knife, of those whose every dream has been shattered like a mirror;

Think of those who bear their pain like a cancer, with the modesty of pain, think also of those who clasp their breasts, their flanks with rage, and dark of heart play with the foliage of their sex;

Think of the timid who are afraid of their desires and tremble as much with fear as with pleasure, of the naive who do not suspect that there are other pleasures, of the chaste whose bodies fall into sleep as the pure beautiful water slides between flowery banks;

Think also, I insist, of the sick who are trapped by fever, of those whose beauty is no more than a decaying flower, of those whose life is but a painful night, and rebuild their dream of lost pleasure, pleasure lost for ever;

Think of the pain of life for a heart without hope, for a body without desire, for eyes without a smile; think of the horror of hours which fall into the nothingness of sensations, think of those who should be pitied, but do not pity them, in order not to increase their distress;

Think rather of justice, it will comfort you and you can burst into laughter; if your laughter is too bitter, breathe red roses or the packet of letters from your pleasant mistress: that will bring you back to reality, which cares nothing for metaphysical ideas.

Pass from the letters of to-day to those of yesterday, love the memory of the women you have loved and bring back to your mouth the taste of their flesh. Thus shall you return to the egoism whence I have made you depart for an instant and you shall regain strength for new expansions of yourself.

In Buddist piety, in the monasteries of Thibet, there is a practice whose meaning pleases me. On days of storm and snow, when the wind fills the precipices, and wipes out

paths, the faithful cut silhouettes of horses in paper, go to the highest point and deliver them to the storm. These images are collected by Buddha; he transforms them into real animals which help poor travellers to pass over difficult ways. My reverie over happy and unhappy women is the same sort of thing. They are paper images I throw into their meditations so that some may find the strength to clasp their illusion and others the sweetness of annihilation. But above all it is the satisfaction of a Nietzschean renunciation into which I sometimes fall. On the days when we depart from egoism, we feel a sort of anticipated liberation from life. It is a deep rest, to which days of festival are propitious. To live only sufficiently to taste the joys of nothingness, and scarcely to taste them, scarcely at all, like a distant music, like the last sound of the night as it falls asleep until everything is resurrected—flowers more lively for having been closed like eyes. Sometimes we must abandon our lives, shut them up and leave the key in a hole of the wall, as the peasants do when they go to the fields. On returning we find the wall-flower more odorous, the stems of the lilies taller, the laurel leaves more shining but the journey to the land of renunciation may last an even shorter time than a brief material absence. A plunge into the gulf is scarcely that when you return; and with what joy, a marvel of simplicity and ease, you find the hand which had cast you in without knowing it.

For my part I have never been entirely in agreement with

any of these erotic thinkers, but there is scarcely one of them who has not made me reflect on myself and on my history. That is to say that in order to understand it better I compare my own physiology with that of another experienced man, for reflections on love like reflections on morality are always the product of a temperament. To erect his personal impressions into laws is the great effort of a man if he is sincere; if he is not sincere, he compiles, and that deceives only novices. But among the authors who have written on love with the sincerity of an observer or of an experimentor, how many have placed themselves in the state of ingenuousness necessary to the task, that is to say who have forgotten all literature? In matters of love we repeat a heap of ancient or scholastic aphorisms which have no other merit but the oratorical antithesis they contain and which are all born from the old opposition of the sexes, that inexhaustible theme of rhetoric.

Applied to love the word chaste has no meaning or only a conventional one, which I do not undertake to define. It is an epithet which is coupled with certain esteemed names, such as that of wife. It is agreed that wives are always chaste until the contrary is proved, just as young girls are always pure. But that is literature, and in very bad taste. In operas these epithets are piled up and they are applied to anything; for example:

"Remain chaste and pure!"

But in love, of whatever kind it may be, how can we

use the word chaste except when it is suggested by an impression of repose, by an attitude? When a woman is asleep with her head on her lover's shoulder, she is always chaste; but if she had thought of being so in the midst of her manifestations, would she still be so? Can one be chaste with the hand of lovers, with the mouth of lovers, with the dreams of lovers? In love chastity is only a kind of avarice, a sort of egoism. Moreover it is absurd. We do not retire from the world in pairs to be chaste, but from the moment we love we may perhaps become chaste, because the body we love becomes so precious that it can no longer be described by unchaste words.

Love, like the spirit, blows where it will and wherever it blows, it tends to realise itself in a bodily fashion, because attractions are physical, that is to say of the body.

Love answers our need for having a person who is interested in us, for whom we are something incomparable and, especially, who accepts our adorations, to whom we can turn all our thoughts. I have known a love which lasted for long years, where the lovers always retained a bodily veneration and astonished respect for each other. They never left each other, and they saw each other every day, without kissing each other's hand. What religion could be superposed upon that? What use would a ritual cult have been to them? They would have been incapable of understanding it, being themselves at once like the gods and like the faithful, holding in themselves all religious values

and realising all ecstacies. If they had been metaphysical beings, they would have created above all philosophies that notion of the divine about which the mystic philosophers argue. It has been said that the cultivated animals (those who live in our intimacy) have over us this superiority, that they hear and touch their gods who are men; and some have seen the very origin of religious sentiment in their conduct towards us. At every moment they ask us for miracles and sometimes these miracles happen. When birds fly past my windows, my cat prays my Omnipotence to stop them so that he can catch them with a sweep of his paw. At one time a cage was hung out at a neighbouring window; how many times the cat came to me and asked me to place it within his reach. Obviously, in its catty mind, I had only to make a gesture, not even that, I had only to will it. I did not perform those miracles, but I perform others daily, which the cat greatly appreciates. When he is hungry, he tells me and I have food brought to him. That is a first sketch of religion, reduced to its simplest but most essential magical elements, wherein the creature communicates directly with the dispensor of all goods. The position of lovers is rather similar. Each of them holds in his arms his god and the creator of his joy. For these privileged beings there is no need to imagine the supreme being on whom they depend and who has all power over their happiness, even over their lives. They feel him around them, on them, in them, in a communion which is precise yet infinite, physical and yet unreal. For from love

having been an imitation of religious movements, it is love which has served as the model for all mystic religions and is their prototype.

A caprice which would not break in the fingers or which would not fade when it was touched and breathed would no longer have the grace of a caprice or of a flower.

The prolonged effects of absence are most to be feared in those persons who have a profound taste for liberty, for liberty is only the license we are given or which we recognise of yielding to every curiosity.

I know that will has played a very small part in my life; at people's first rebellion I have always abandoned my desires and have become, not discouraged, but disinterested. My pride has always risen above revolt, which I think a little plebeian. Achilles retired to his tent; I retire to the solitude of my silence where I have excellent remedies for boredom and even for wounds.

I like the will to live, the appetite for happiness in you, Amazon. You may be made to suffer, but they cannot destroy that vehemence which carries you towards beauty and towards love. Like all persons born to dominate and to bend others beneath their yoke, you do not give way before a disappointment, which only overwhelms you for a moment, and your woman warrior's pagan heart is renewed thereby. It is a sight which enchants me like the rejuvena-

tion of the year; and what an example it is to me who am always ready to despair of myself and find only too many reasons for it. You on the contrary have what Emerson calls self-reliance; and so happiness is always before you and you smile eternally at the melancholy of the past. The past is always melancholy. We should be able to look at it as at a landscape which is plunged in the mists of distance. It is nothing but a dream. Dream for dream, let us try to guess that point of the horizon from which will arise the future vision, with its train of sensations, sentiments and reveries. If life is worth living, it is in that way.

It is a strange morality which causes pleasure to be looked upon as a diminution of one's self. Men have come to feel a sort of shame for the joy they have drawn from their secret senses. And it is not hypocrisy; they are sincere; their shame is real. The freest feel it or have felt it, if not for themselves, for their brothers. To what depth have the dark powers of Christianity ravaged our natural consciousness! We feel a certain pride at knowing ourselves capable of the pleasures of the eyes, the pleasures of the ears, even the pleasures of the mouth. But he who confesses himself capable of all other enjoyments is considered a cynic. They are looked upon indeed as gross. They are exercised, it is said, with the body and with the least honourable parts of the body, as if there were a hierarchy of sensual good manners anywhere except in custom, as if the eyes and ears were not material organs. Moreover does

not sexual pleasure affect these superior senses which are considered considerably spiritual, and does it not confound them in one sense of magnificent amplitude? What would be the joys of love without sight, without smell, without hearing, without taste, without the mind and sentiment, without the intelligence, and how can they be understood when reduced to the exercise of the genetic sense along? Voluptuousness is born from the harmony of all the senses united under the mastery of a supreme sense which leads them all to the same end in harmonious conflict. And only voluptuousness can realise such a union, which, outside all experience, would allow us to predict its necessary superiority over every other sensual exercise, or sensorial, which is quite the same thing.

But experience alone allows us to prove it to ourselves. We do not always succeed in it, we even succeed rarely; moreover, I am convinced that a very large number of men and a still larger number of women have not experienced it and never will. Most content themselves with an approximation which, though yet very satisfactory, only creates a moderate conviction in them. Women sometimes seek passionately for this philosopher's stone and retire persuaded that it is only an illusion. Man at least always catches a glimpse of it, and his fervour is thereby augmented. The schools of voluptuousness are so commonplace! Gifted with better aptitudes, the predisposed person should invent and create almost everything. But in this class genius is rare and easily discouraged. I am purposely

obscure. Otherwise I should be accused of being depraved, while I am only thinking like a good gardener of the natural cultivation of the senses! At least I shall say that I consider him an incomplete person who has not drawn from his organs all the pleasure they contain. As Bernier said, I consider that a great sin against nature. Those who have neglected nature's presence and who have chosen only her bitter fruits from among all she offers to men, who have only set their teeth in the husk of green nuts, have certainly no right to complain of her.

To talk about love with a young woman is one of the pleasures of our delicate civilisation. To find no enjoyment in it a man would indeed have to be the lowest of Methodist parsons. But there is hardly a woman who does not enjoy it too, even with the least seductive of men, even the least disposed to let herself be seduced, even she who from her physiological nature cannot be seduced. I do not say that these talks do not awake certain confused movements in the man who indulged in this game, or that the woman, even one whose desires go further or nearer, does not feel some faint passing curiosity for him who is analysing the great secrets with her. A woman does not easily dissociate intellectual emotion from physical emotion. It is her most evident natural superiority over man that all her emotions, without ever thwarting or contradicting each other, are more surely gathered in one unique centre, whence they radiate in every direction. Women are nature

itself, Nature which ignores so profoundly the distinction between the spiritual and the temporal. In a conversation about the things of life, their attention hearkens from all the parts of their bodies; and this gives it a superior charm. When the man who converses with them in an intimate tone possesses, in spite of appearances (to which they pay little attention), something feminine in his nervous texture, a charming agreement is set up between these two persons who only touch each other with the tip of their antennae and penetrate each other perfectly well, the more so since they set aside all ulterior design and do not imagine themselves realising the great union. When that is to take place, it happens first, but when loosened generally leaves little hope of these tenderly intellectual realizations.

Without imagination life is almost nothing; a series of facts differently felt, according to their exact echo, which most of the time is something very slight. Imagination has created values. Thus we hardly ever know exactly what is going on in others, especially in the person we love most, because, instead of feeling the fact directly we perceive it through a deforming apparatus. Or rather, we do not feel the fact itself but our own sensibility thrown as it were on a screen before us, it is ourselves whose painful contortions we watch. And in a sense it is true that we do not suffer from others but only from ourselves.

I was told a story the other day which I think would

make a very curious novel; it is the adventure of a very devoted and very happy lover who separated from his mistress after a serious illness she went through. Concentrated in those words this will seem to you a very ordinary anecdote, but listen to the details.

At first he was greatly upset and spent many days and nights in anguish. As the illness grew, so his love and pain grew with them and made his life a terror. His pain had reached its highest point when a sudden change occurred in the sick woman's state and it was soon seen that she was out of danger. Overwhelmed by his pain, he doubted for a long time but as the news he was given became more and more reassuring, he was taken with a joy as strong as a heavy fever which had almost the same effects. He became exuberant and almost raved. Although usually nearly mute and gloomy for so long a time, he began to tell absurd and sometimes shocking stories which his friends could not have understood if his state of mind had not provided the explanation. He kept talking about an extreme misfortune followed by a resurrection and heavenly joys. He was a rather positive though sentimental mind, but he began to give signs of mysticism and his friends greatly dreaded the first meeting of the two lovers. It took place in a garden in the country and was indeed touching. They were two resurrected souls who met, one from death, the other from pain. Their first words and soon their first caresses gave them so great a joy in the imagination that the convalescent almost swooned and the lover had a wild

Porte d'entrée du logis
Hôtel de R. d. G.
rue de Rivoli
1912

look. But when they were calmer, feeling perhaps a danger, and tried to take up again their old confidences, the convalescent spoke only of her illness and the lover of his pain. Without meaning to they had each created a new world in which they wandered without being able to make its paths join up with the old world of their happy love. They did not notice it, but the present was to them a kind of beyond where happiness reigns naturally without there being any necessity for them to attach themselves to another in order to feel it. During the following visit the situation of their minds scarcely changed; however, the woman, having a more dependent and more faithful tenderness, succeeded in taking some steps in the old track, along the path of reminiscences. Little by little, she felt herself becoming once more the loving thing she naturally was; the presence of her beloved drove away her memories of solitude and replaced in her the images of convalescence which had been her sole occupation for so long. Feebly at first, perhaps earlier than she ought, she desired kisses and employed her faithful artifices to obtain them. There was a struggle against domestic espionage which occupied them for some time and gave them both, though unequally, a return of their first pleasures. At last a day brought a more propitious opportunity, desire was stronger than prudence, and the invincible observer might have thought that on their walk the two lovers had definitely linked up the old with the new paths of their love. However it was not wholly true, and this uncertain bond was soon to show

its fragility. The convalescent was now quite well and not far from resuming her usual way of life. The illness had left no traces in her body and even less in her mind. She dismissed the nurse and a few well arranged absences showed the doctor that his visits were no longer required. The season was advancing and in spite of the contradictory charm of autumn for a resurrected heart, she made ready to return to town. At first nothing was changed. Everything was in its place, furniture, friends and lover; this docile heart easily obeyed a happiness which was so well arranged and which followed so well the round of the season. However an exactly opposite ferment took place in her lover's mind. Having nothing to fear from the present, he remembered his past pain with terror and lived in it. The long fear from which he had suffered encircled and limited his memories. He could not return to the blessed hours before his uneasiness and he found himself murmuring at the moment of meeting her:

"I wonder in what state I shall find her?"

The present escaped his attention; his life remained coloured with the hues which had darkened it for a time. Thus little by little he became accustomed to seeing nothing in his mistress but causes of pain, and this pain itself became so monotonous that he seemed to accept it as an inevitable companion. Since his gloomy aspect and shut-in character were well known, his friends took no notice of it, and interpreted in the most favourable manner the silence to which he had returned. But one day when he

looked more cheerful than usual, he perceived his own boredom and, while he was being congratulated on according his manner with the inner state of his heart, he realised the emptiness in which he was struggling. At last, sometime later, he admitted to himself that he was no longer in love, and very nearly said so aloud, which made him blush as when we stop short of some breach of good manners. Suddenly he felt relieved. Knowing the cause of his sadness he could struggle against it. No longer loving his mistress, he began to desire all women without shame and yielded to some of his desires, which had a happy termination. When his mistress perceived his coldness she was no longer in her full renewal. Roses of a second growth are more fragile than the roses of a single season. They dried in the heart of the mistress as in the lover's, and thus was untied gently a bond which was not made to resist the accidents of life. I think this ending very sad. Braver hearts would not have endured it. But I repeat to you the story as it was told to me. It is a tapestry canvas where I have filled in badly the drawing made by abler workers. These characters will be unpleasing to you from their submission to the chances of existence. Fate does what it likes with them. And this is common enough.

The boredom I sing is not boredom with dead eyes and a gloomy face. It is smiling. It looks at life and life looks at it. Seated one before the other and sometimes side by side, and sometimes hand in hand, they hearken

to the thoughts they do not express, mingled with desires whose rhythm is regular as that of a healthy heart. Imagine that image drawn by an old painter in the days when painters had ideas. Imagine Albrecht Durer's Melancholy made masculine, with less wild eyes, seated beside a magnificent woman who contains under the veil of her dress and the veil of her flesh the secret of all vain joys which are too real, that is to say fugitive. They will remain thus for a long time, not always, but enough for ennui to smile at last at the attractions of life and to keep, when the vision has disappeared, the attitude it imposed. Then ennui plunges into itself and goes intoxicated with itself when it descends into the depths of the abyss and runs over all its enchantments.

But we are no longer in the days of allegorical paintings; men's minds are too idle, no longer have the patience to discern it, and, since they no longer reflect, do not understand it. They must be taken slowly into the fully planned garden and placed suddenly in the play of sensation. Ennui is not a delicious feeling. As I conceive it and enjoy its contact, it is a naked feeling. One feels in it life stripped of all decoration, reduced to itself, to its sole charms which may be reduced to this: existence. I am trying once more to explain that we should learn to enjoy pure life dissociated from the idea of happiness, that delusion which spoils our best moments, which drags us at every moment out of ourselves and leaves us at the mercy of every irony which promises it to us. An irony which does not dupe us

for more than an instant and whose cruelty we learn from the least experience of life; yet it is sufficient to hide from us the true life which is only the sentiment of ourselves, the sentiment of our flowing away in contrast with the permanence of things.

To escape this slow sure flight of our life we clutch at the trees on the river bank, but the soft branches of the willow or the brittle branches of the poplar yield and float down with us, often exhausted by the effort and we drown the sooner. Ah! How much better it is to lie in the boat of ennui, to let ourselves go with the current, to follow it with majesty and to glide royally towards the abyss beside the banks whence rises towards us a desire, sometimes a glance, always a perfume. But if it is useless to struggle against the inevitable current, ennui makes delicious use of its pauses, of its resting-places in loops and curves, to gather the pleasures where it halts at unforeseen moments. Nothing predisposes one to profound pleasures so much as a profound ennui which desires no others and carefully avoids the trivial pleasures sown through life. Ennui is not the school of suicide, to which the constant practice of it would infallibly lead. It accepts the diversions to human nature and finds in them new strength to continue its reverie which otherwise would become atrophied. Man is not made for continuity and he could only enjoy plenitude for a time.

Criticise men's morals! It needs more naiveté than I

possess. To tell you the truth, I think they always do well when they do what pleases them; they alone are not duped by our extraordinary moral organization. But let us not judge men and still less women by ourselves. Most of them are very well satisfied with their slavery, so much so that their goodness suffers at the miserable condition of those who have got free. They do everything in the world to catch them again and to re-place the yoke on their necks by force:

"You do not know happiness, our happiness, come and we will share it with you."

There are some unfortunate people who allow themselves to be caught by such talk. Others when it is possible, are caught by force.

I am haunted by the technique of an unknown masterpiece. But I practise too much the philosophy of detachment ever to yield to such naiveté of self-love and I endure resignedly the displeasure caused me by what I write by thinking of the marvellous books I shall never write. Ah! How I envy those authors who admire themselves in their works and who do not see the advancing nothingness into which they and their books will fall. I envy them, but I smile with a little irony perhaps, for none of it is of much importance. But we must live, and therefore we must hold on firmly to some tuft of grass beside the river which carries us all away like the shipwrecked creatures we are. The feeling that we please those we should have wished to please

and the feeling that we displease others whom we should gladly have chosen for that office, sometimes suffice to maintain us in the balance and to fortify our hearts and hands. One of these comforts only touches our pride and has merely a negative effect on the pleasure of living; but the other moves every fibre of sympathy and in itself may procure a sufficient joy.

Stendhal, who was not considered a vulgar sentimentalist, had only one object in his ripe age as well as in his youth: to capture one of those "terrible animals" who are delicate young women, and if he wrote, it was with the hope of being read by some of them, by a few women like those he had loved, whose souls he had touched more than he had asked them for pleasure. But the women he adored most, he could not approach without trembling; or when he was bolder he was too sincere to convince them or even to learn from them whether he had touched their hearts. In him there was something of Petrarch or even of the Dante of the *Vita Nuova,* and how well one understands why he declared he was a Milanese! It was from love for a country where love was above all a serious thing, a position it has never attained in France, the country of smutty jests and of insipid pleasantries about cuckoldry, the foundations of our literature, the academic hopes of every ambitious writer.

You who know my books well, Amazon, be witness that none of my imaginations has ever evolved about adultery,

and that for me the social fact, as serious people call it, never had the least importance. It seems to me that I obscurely perceived its meanness before ever I reflected on the subject and that I always considered love as a natural fact whose developments and complications only concern the sufferers who are hurt by them, and from which others, even husbands, especially husbands, should turn away with modesty. I have heard it said that this has been taken as a romantic idea. That would only prove that romanticism was nearer to nature than any other literary conception. But that is not true. It is just as much a classic idea, and makes the beauty of Racine's tragedies, that passions evolve above the laws without meeting any obstacles except in the characters.

And that is why, since we are talking of literature, the modern middle-class tragedy which is called "a piece" (for it is indeed an unnamable thing) has dragged on for nearly a hundred and fifty years in the flattest quibbling. As soon as we see the jealous frowning husband enter, we flounder in comedy, even if he has a revolver in his hand, and it is time to laugh. How can we take seriously a situation which is the revolt of man against himself, against the laws he has made? It is the awkward man caught in his own snare, and at the most it rouses physical fear or pity. Women, who did not make the laws and are subject to them, alone have the right to revolt without being ridiculous; therefore sympathy always goes instinctively to them when they are—and they always are—the pivot of

one of these lugubrious farces. For anyone writing works of imagination, the only way not to take part in these Saturnalia of reason is to consider the social laws as not existing and to refrain from mixing up with them the persons whose story we are telling. Notice how Emma Bovary's adventures develop freely, how they obey only the natural law of the obstacles of character, how the husband is kept to one side. An awkward writer would certainly have made him intervene, but Flaubert was above such manoeuvres and when the poor man's feelings break out at the end, it is sadness and not jealousy; it is the soul of a man, the soul of a poor lover, and not that of a legal proprietor puffed up with his rights. For man is the proprietor of his wife. Not so very long ago the English allowed him to sell her. The wife accepts this position, sometimes with a strange pride. Christianity has tatooed her with the device of Christian slaves: *Serviam*. She serves her master with a capricious but real goodwill, and grants him pleasures she does not share but in which she finds those of the prostitution for which she is so excellently made. Sometimes I should prefer more nobility in love relations and that mutual complacencies should be conquests and never the command of a master.

But this is trying to reform nature or the morals acquired from heredity; and I have not a reformer's temperament. We can look at what we like and avert our eyes from what we do not like. I only like love in liberty, in the person who takes himself back as soon as he has given himself, but who

takes himself back perhaps only to have the joy of giving himself again, and I prefer the person who does not give himself to the person who abdicates his will. Nothing social. The conditions of society do not suit me as a subject of meditation. I am not versed in political economy, with which the world where I habitually live and wherein I take more pleasure than in daily reality, has very little to do.

That is why my novels are not a portrayal of legal life and also why they can only please those who place their ideal further up. There is a "further up" (a phrase which belongs to M. Vielé-Griffin) in more than one direction. What does it matter which we have taken, so long as at the end or along the way we find liberty of mind and the full development of our faculties!

At one time I could not resist a desire, but I saw that accomplished desires and suspended desires died of the same death, the former from shock and the latter from consumption, which is gentler but just as much death. Then I ceased to take an interest in either. I became reasonable. But I am uttering blasphemies which are also lies. My state of mind is only like that at moments and, when I am healthy, I say just the contrary; until the end we should be like blind and inexperienced animals before life. As long as we are living it is to live, and there is only life in the tendency of the being to all realisations which are in his power, and even to those which exceed it. Experience is a great school of cowardice; to bow to it is vile. When

we do not tell ourselves that anything may happen, we are worthy of the kingdom of shadows.

I have only too great a tendency to proud renunciations and if it is a little late to modify my nature, there is always time to know and admit it. But I confess also that I more often struggled against my tendencies than I have yielded to them. You can see what contradictions that must have led to. For my part, I do not feel them; philosophically I consider contradiction as necessary to the balance of the intellect and passions. But for contradiction one would fall into habit and from habit into conviction, which is the last degree of stupidity. When we always lean on the same sort of thoughts, the same sort of acts, we slip into them, we sink in them. We should walk more lightly on the surface of things. I have even struggled against the tendencies of sentiment, which is no small matter, for sentiment envelops us like a scent and often paralyses our intelligence. But then, when we are conquered after skilful debates, what joys! We are like a man dropping with sleep, at the moment when he is stretched out in bed; he would go to sleep even if he was never to wake again. It happens. I am not referring to other people. It is my own condition at the very moment I am speaking to you.

We should give our lives a certain tint of happiness, if only to avoid the pity of our fellows. Well, I do not think the will is of much help here. We can appear happy in every position into which chance throws us and we can al-

most always make ourselves master of a certain happiness which is sufficient for us not to desire death thrice a day. I have never made much use of my will, and I only desire death once a day, in the morning when I wake up; but as soon as I rise, which I do at once, a hundred little happinesses present themselves to me, such as drinking a large glass of lemon and water, smoking cigarettes, going out to look at trees and women, sometimes even writing, when I have something a little difficult on hand. When I discover the prospect of spending a few moments of the day near you, I feel life is good, like a child when he sees the sunlight in his room. What has the will to do with all this? If the persons I love turned away from me, would not the most violent will be impotent to stop them? The more we will that we shall be loved the less we succeed. I know you can bring a proof to the contrary against me, but as a good logician I shall retort that a fact is only a fact and cannot serve to support a general argument.

Sincerity is a terrible cause of misunderstanding.

Why have I laboured in my life? Not for money, I am not greedy for it; not for fame, I am not duped by it. I only thought of giving myself pleasure, and I have scarcely ever succeeded. Doubt pursued me even within myself.

It is a mistake to have sought too soon to understand life. Apart from the fact that it is difficult and that we rarely succeed in it, we should not be any better off if we

solved the problem, for in every problem the solution is not the important thing, but the method. Well, the intellectual method is particularly sterile. It yields only appearances, it only allows us to cast shadows. Life is first of all physical, it is supported by physical powers, it is developed by physical means; it is only conquered by physical weapons and only yields its secret under physical pressure. Once in possession of that secret we can treat it with intellectual reagents, but first of all we have to tear it from the organism which holds it.

INTIMATE LETTERS TO THE AMAZON

[LETTRES INTIMES A L'AMAZONE]

1927

Sunday evening, Christmas 1910. 7 p. m.

AS you went away you left your perfume, flowers, and a wonderful little tree. You are divine. You think of everything, even of those Christmas roses I once mentioned to you. I should have liked to be alone with you, to hear from you. But to see you is always a happiness, to see you, to watch you, to listen to you, in spite of the torture and duty of appearing indifferent. Just now I re-read some of your poems to rediscover the spirit in which I first read them. Then it was only curiosity, now there is piety as well; everything which comes from you is dear to me. The first dedications—how precious all that has become to me!

1st January, 1911

My dear,

If my first writing was not for you this morning (it was for all indifferently) my first thought went out to you. It was dark, I got up, I lit my lamp to re-read the letter from Natalis, which I had recited in my dreams all night, but in fragments and without being able to bring them to coherence. The beating of the heart I wished you, how I had it last evening when I read your awaited but unguessed at letter! I had a moment of inexpressible happiness. How you can find delicate and sure words, the words needed, divine friend, to enchant my sad and always uneasy heart. Uneasy and happy, less anxious to please you perhaps (that is a miracle) than not to displease you. And you speak to me as I did not hope any one would ever speak to me. Then I must indeed confess (to myself alone) that I love you, and I shall gaze at your eyes with more fervour.

* * *

Friday, 27th January, 1911

If I still knew the gods, how I should like to thank them for having sent Natalis to me. For to me you are a present fallen from heaven, at that moment of my life when I was most depressed, when I no longer cared for anything, when I hoped for nothing, when I no longer wanted anything. I had become a phantom, and what a phantom! See then how I must love you. An Arabian poet asserts that we should never say that to a woman. But we are above an

Arabian poet. Otherwise, where would happiness be? And then, I am speaking to Natalis, to a soul similar to my own . . . I love Natalis.

30th July, 1911

I am kept here by a stupidity, the fabrication of the *Revue des Idées* for which I am alone this month. There was some idea of stopping it, and I should have been free. What a thing is devotion to science! For this *Revue,* which runs very badly, brings me in nothing but annoyances, like the present annoyance which is big, big, big. You were a little cross with me for not obeying you, I felt it, but I am much more cross with myself and this morning I regretted so much that I have very nearly left everything to go off. Many occupations, accepted and desired when I was very glad to have something to do to pass the long days, now weigh on me when my thought is rich with you. I have never too much time to dream you, and if you were only a dream I would have no other pastime. But you are a dear reality to me and everything should belong to you. I feel that my life is now nothing if you do not take it. How strange it is, the slightest absence inspires imaginations which would not come into the mind if we always breathed the same air. It is like the boat yesterday. We had to step back from it to see it better. Distance is the magic mirror wherein we perceive with magnificent precision all the thoughts which swarm confusedly about the person we

love. Tenderness knows no diplomacy. It speaks more loudly, for the voice must carry further. And here am I, as soon as I have written, leaving everything to converse with you at the very moment when you are going away, when you have perhaps not yet gone. But I have thought so much of you during this stormy night that all work, all assembling of ideas is impossible to me until I have spoken to you. Then yesterday there was something in your face I could not decipher, there was some foreign thought between us and twice I could not obtain the response I wanted, I expected; your hand remained dead. I am always uneasy when I have been unable to read your face. This visit has brought us the melancholy of the past, renewal, regret, in the folds of its West Indian dress. Is it that? But was I not disappointed in the tender evening of farewells I looked for? At that moment if you had explained your journey and its route to me, with a tender word, you could have obtained a promise from me. I should have returned to it but for the arrival of the stranger. Perhaps we should have found a way to conciliate everything. It was not found, nor was it the next day. Ah! I assure you if I had had a presentiment of the ennui which grips me this morning you would have found me somewhere on your way. Can you imagine the pleasure of watching for your carriage like a thief at the corner of the wood? When I see it come towards me it seems as if it is going to enter into me. I love it. It is a part of you. And my salvation is in the land of Normandy. Tell me,

should I not be there? in any case? I kiss your tender hands devoutly.

[END OF VOLUME I]

APPENDIX TO VOL. I

THIRTY-SIX UNPUBLISHED LETTERS FROM REMY DE GOURMONT TO RICHARD ALDINGTON

(July 1913—August 1915)

NOTE

THIS set of Gourmont's letters concentrates a somewhat dismal gleam on the last eighteen months of his life. Probably they will surprise even his intimate French friends, for he was extremely reticent about himself. No doubt his friends scarcely realised that he was forced to write tedious articles to support himself during those months of war.

What happened was this. For some time I had been

trying to make known Gourmont's work in America and England by writing articles on him and by translations. Then came the war. Probably many people have forgotten, and some have never known, how completely France's normal life was paralysed. In a week everything was at a standstill. For a writer there was nothing. No reviews, no periodicals, no books were issued (except war news) and the sale of books practically ceased. At the same time the Bourse was shut and a moratorium was proclaimed. It was difficult to get any money and securities could not be realised. From Gourmont's letter of the 19th October, 1914, I judged he was faced with penury. I felt certain that he would take nothing from the Amazon and that his French friends would be in a like case with himself. The remaining letters are chiefly a record of our joint efforts to deal with the situation. Miss Amy Lowell came to the rescue with two hundred dollars, for which she afterwards received the complete MS of the *Nuit au Luxembourg*. *The New Republic* paid a hundred dollars for some articles it did not use. Towards the middle of 1915 conditions improved in France, and Gourmont was obviously less anxious, but the strain of the war, the harassing menace of penury during the winter of 1914, his continued ill-health, broke him down completely and he died in September, 1915.

UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF REMY DE GOURMONT TO RICHARD ALDINGTON

I

Dear Sir:

Your visit was announced to me as possible about four o'clock by Miss Barney and I waited until nearly five, but had then to go out. I greatly regretted this and I hope that at my return (for I am going away) I shall have the pleasure of meeting you. Nothing will be more agreeable to me.

Yours,
Remy de Gourmont
14 Juillet (1913)

Cher Monsieur:

Votre visite m'était annoncée comme possible vers. 4h. par Miss Barney et j'ai attendu jusqu'à près de 5h., mais à ce moment j'ai du sortir. Je l'ai beaucoup regretté et j'espére qu'à la rentrée (car je pars) j'aurai le plaisir de vous rencontrer. Rien ne me sera plus agréable. Votre bien dévoué,

Remy de Gourmont

II

Dear Sir:

For books which appeared in France more than ten years

ago an English publisher has nothing to pay either to the author or to the French publisher. He has only to deal with the translator. I thought you were aware of this.

I am sending you my last book. The *Epilogues* are too old. I shall ask my publisher to send you *Le Latin Mystique*. I think he will not do so unless you promise him a special article in an English periodical. I have no copy of it at my disposal. I admit it is dear but so well printed!

Excuse my brevity, I am rather unwell.

Yours,
Remy de Gourmont
71 rue des Saints-Pères
(15. 1. 1914)

Cher Monsieur:

Pour les livres parus en France il y a plus de dix ans, un éditeur anglais n'a rien à payer ni à l'auteur ni à l'éditeur français. Il n'a absolument à traiter qu'avec le traducteur. Je croyais que vous étiez au courant.

Je vais vous faire envoyer mon dernier livre. Pour les *Epilogues,* c'est trop ancien. Je demanderai à mon éditeur s'il peut vous envoyer *Le Latin Mystique*. Je crois qu'il ne le voudra pas à moins que vous ne lui promettez un article special dans une revue anglaise. Pour moi, je n'en dispose d'aucun exemplaire. Je le reconnais, c'est cher, mais si bien imprimé!

Excusez ma brièveté, je suis assez souffrant.

Votre dévoué,
Remy de Gourmont

III

(Post Card)

Dear Sir:

Thank you for the trouble you are taking on my behalf. Rouveyre's drawing does not please me much. But then! It is not of much importance. I am glad your little book has had some success.

Cordially,
R. G.

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(? 1914)

Cher Monsieur:

Je vous remercie de toute la peine que vous vous donnez pour moi. Le dessin de Rouveyre ne me plait guère. Enfin! Cela n'a pas grande importance. Je suis heureux que votre petit livre ait eu du succès. Cordialement, R. G.

IV

(Post Card)

Dear Sir:

I have received your letter and await *Everyman*. I have every confidence in you for the translation of Simone. It would please me.

Is there one of your reviews, of the reviews where you are known, which would take from me a short article which I should like to give at the same time to a little French literary review where I have promised it. Would the Eng-

lish periodical pay me suitably? If it can be arranged, I will send you you the copy of the article soon.

Yours,

R. G.

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(18. 4. 1914)

Cher Monsieur:

J'ai reçu votre lettre et j'attends *Every Man*. J'ai toute confiance en vous pour la traduction de *Simone*. Cela me sera agréable.

Y a t-il une de vos revues, des revues où vous êtes familier, qui me prendrait un court article que je desirerais donner en même temps à une petite revue littéraire française où je l'ai promis? La revue anglaise me le paierait-elle convenablement? Si cela s'arrange, je vous enverrai prochainement une copie de cet article.

Yours,

R. G.

V

Dear Mr. Aldington:

It is an article on French literature where English literature is also discussed. *The Egoist* would suit me very well. I am waiting for the copy to send you. The only conditions, in the interests of the French and the English periodical, is that the article should appear at the closest date to the 15th June. The 14th is a Sunday, consequently either at the end of the preceding week or at the end of the next. You see what I mean. But *The Egoist* appears on

the 1st and the 15th. Therefore the 15th June would be the ideal date, since the French review, *Les Marges,* also appears on the 15th of the month.

No, I am not sufficiently well acquainted with the contemporary English prose-writers to risk a study of them. But I have another plan which I will mention to you when the question of this first article is settled.

Very cordially,

Remy de Gourmont

(24. 4. 1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

C'est un article sur la littérature française où il est question aussi de l'anglaise. *L'Egoïste* me conviendrait très bien. J'attends le copie pour vous l'envoyer. La seule condition, dans l'intérêt de la revue française comme de la revue anglaise, est que l'article paraisse à la date la plus approchée du 15 juin. Le 14 est un dimanche, par conséquent soit à la fin de la semaine precedente, soit à la fin de la suivante. Vous me comprenez. Mais *The Egoist* parait le 1-er et le 15. Donc le 15 juin serait le date idéale, la revue française, les *Marges,* paraissant également le 15 du mois.

Non, je ne connais pas assez les prosateurs anglais contemporains pour risquer une étude sur eux. Mais j'ai un autre projet dont je vous parlerai quand sera réglée la question de ce premier article.

Bien cordialement,

R. de Gourmont

VI

(Post Card)

Dear Mr. Aldington:

Do what seems preferable to you with the *Masques.*

Likewise with what you call the "Symbolist Essays," but remember that if you take them from volumes which have been out for less than ten years, the French publisher will claim his rights.

Very cordially,

R. G.

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(1. 6. 14)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Faites ce qui vous semblera préférable pour les *Masques*. Egalement pour ce que vous appelez les "essais symbolistes," mais souvenez-vous que si vous les prenez dans des volumes publiés il y a moins de dix ans, l'éditeur français reclamera des droits.

Bien cordialement,

R. G.

VII

(Post Card)

Dear Mr. Aldington:

My compliments on your translation, although *Poetry* has slightly modified it. I shall be glad if you will send a copy to les *Marges,* 5 rue Chaptal, Paris.

I am here in the country, and send you my compliments.

R. G.

(Carte Postale)

Coutances (Manche)
(21. 7. 1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Mes compliments pour votre traduction, quoique *Poetry* l'ait

un peu modifiée. Je serai heureux que vous en envoyez un exemplaire aux Marges, 5 rue Chaptal, Paris.

Je suis ici à la campagne, d'où je vous envoie mes compliments.

R. G.

VIII

(Post Card)

Dear Mr. Aldington:

Thank you for the magnificent article you wrote about me for the *Outlook*. It would have given me still more pleasure if it had appeared during less dramatic events. I have stayed where I was in a little Normandy town, Coutances, which will remain my address for a long time. I do nothing but wait for the news. All literary talk has ceased with us. Last month there was a lot of talk about you in the *Soirées de Paris*. Everyone has gone now. Many thanks and friendly greetings.

R. G.

(Carte Postale)

Coutances (Manche)
(16. 8. 1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Je vous remercie du magnifique article que vous avez donné sur moi à *l'Outlook*. Il m'aurait fait plus de plaisir encore s'il avait paru au cours d'événements moins dramatiques. Je suis resté ou je me trouvais dans une petite ville de Normandie, à Coutances, qui sera encore pendant longtemps mon adresse. Je n'y fais rien que d'attendre les nouvelles. Tout bruit littéraire a cessé chez nous. Le mois dernier on parlait beaucoup de vous

dans les *Soirées de Paris*. Tout le monde à cette heure est partie. Bien des amitiés et des mercis. R. G.

IX

Dear Mr. Aldington:

Your letter was four days in reaching me. At the moment I write to you all the French newspapers are full of confidence. I have no reason for not sharing it, although . . . We are passing through very oppressive hours. All intellectual life has ceased. One feeds on oneself. And the whole future is dreadful, for everything is dead and I know not whether I shall see the resurrection. I was convalescent and you may well imagine that I make little progress towards health. No reviews, no newspapers to write in, I do nothing. I wait. I try to think.

You are more fortunate in England. But I shall stay here whatever happens.

Yours,
Remy de Gourmont

Coutances, Vendredi
(28. 8. 1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Votre lettre a mis quatre jours à me parvenir. Dans tous les journaux français, on est plein de confiance au moment où je vous ecris. Je n'ai aucun raison pour ne pas le partager, quoique . . . Ce sont des heures bien lourdes que celles que nous passons. Toute vie intellectuelle est arrêtée. On se dévore soi-même. Et tout avenir est affreux, car tout est mort et je sais pas si j'en verrai la résurrection. J'étais en convalescence et vous pensez

bien que je ne fais guère de progrès vers la santé. Plus de revues, plus de journaux où écrire, je ne fais rien. J'attends. Je tâche de penser.

Vous êtes plus heureux en Angleterre. Mais je reste ici, quoiqu'il arrive. A vous,

Remy de Gourmont

X

(Picture Post Card)

Coutances, Public Gardens

I hope to write you soon from Paris. I know nothing of Paul Fort. But I do not think so. I shall send you news from Paris. The English are marvellous. Friendly greetings,

Remy de Gourmont

(Carte Postale illustré)

Coutances, Jardin Public
(27. 9. 1914)

J'espère vous écrire prochainement de Paris. Je ne sais rien de Paul Fort. Mais je ne crois pas. De Paris je vous donnerai des nouvelles. Les Anglais sont merveilleux. Amitiés,

R. de Gourmont

XI

(Post Card)

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I am back in Paris, not without difficulty and without

much pleasure, but I am less isolated and at last I can work a little. Give me your news and news of England.

Very cordially yours,

R. G.

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(13. 10. 1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Me voici rentré à Paris, non sans peine et sans beaucoup de joie, mais je suis moins isolé et je puis enfin travailler un peu. Donnez-moi de vos nouvelles et des nouvelles de l'Angleterre.

Bien cordialement à vous, R. G.

XII

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I have received *The Egoist* and its purely literary and philosophical tone pleases me very much. Let us not allow the tradition of free minds to perish. I still write, but at present in France there is very little hope of remuneration for one's copy. And I foresee hard times, for in this crisis I have lost almost everything. Sometimes I think that a large English newspaper or a review might take from me some letters on the present condition of Paris, on anything, no matter what. Illusion, is it not?

I cannot tell you precisely where Anatole France is. Recently he was at Tours. You can obtain precise information by writing to his publisher, Calmann-Lévy, Rue Auber, Paris. It is the surest way.

I think our General Staff is only waiting for the English, the big English force, to strike the decisive blow. In this connection you give me good news. If England needs (Anatole) France, I wonder why? But I respect your silence. Would she needed me! I write a note every day for a newspaper, *La France,* but it is agreed that I shall only be paid later on. Times are hard for the author. I shall soon have to sell some securities. I have some stock in the Anglo-Egyptian Land Bank. But there is no Bourse.

Very cordially yours,

Remy de Gourmont

Lundi 19 Oct. (1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

J'ai bien reçu *l'Egoist* et son ton purement littéraire et philosophique m'a beaucoup plu. Ne laissons pas mourir la tradition des libres esprits. J'écris encore, mais il y a peu d'espoir présentement en France d'y vois rémunérer sa copie. Et je prévois des temps durs, car dans cette crise j'ai à peu près tout perdu. Je songe quelquefois qu'un grand journal anglais ou une revue pourrait me prendre des lettres sur l'état présent de Paris, n'importe quoi. Chimère, n'est-ce-pas?

Je ne puis vous dire exactement où est France. Dernièrement il était à Tours. Vous auriez un renseignement précis en écrivant à son éditeur, Calmann-Lévy, rue Auber, Paris. C'est le plus sûr moyen.

Je crois que notre Etat-Major n'attend que les Anglais, la grande force anglaise, pour porter le coup décisif. Vous me donnez à ce propos de bonnes nouvelles. Si l'Angleterre a besoin de France, je me demande pourquoi, mais je respecte votre silence. Que n'a-t-elle aussi besoin de moi! J'écris tous les jours une note

dans un journal, *La France*, mais il est convenu que je ne serai payé que plus tard. Les temps sont durs pour l'écrivain. Je devrai bientôt vendre des titres. J'en ai d'une valeur Anglo-Egyptienne *Land Bank*. Mais il n'y a plus de Bourse.

Bien cordialement à vous,

Remy de Gourmont

XIII

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I thank you and I thank Mr. Harold Monro. I received the money order and I shall try to do my best with an articles on "the effect of war on literary Paris."

I also thought of *Poetry*. Herewith two little short pieces, "epigrams," which I should like to see in print. I am writing a short correspondence.

So much the better that the lady is not the one I thought. The 1000 francs would be pleasant to me. Three Land Bank obligations would be at her disposal. They were quoted at 390 francs before the war. Total: 1170. Very cordially yours,

Remy de Gourmont

Vendredi (30. 10. 1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Je vous remercie et je remercie M. Harold Monro. J'ai bien reçu le mandat et je vais tâcher de faire de mon mieux un article sur *the effect of war on literary Paris*.

Je pense aussi à *Poetry*. Cî-joint deux petites piéces courtes, des "épigrammes," que j'aimerais à lui voir imprimer. Je rédige une courte correspondance.

Tant mieux que la dame ne soit celle que je pensais. Les 1000 fr. me seraient agréable. Trois obligations "Land Bank" seraient à sa disposition. On les cotait 390 fr. avant la guerre. Total: 1170. Bien cordialement à vous,

Remy de Gourmont

XIV

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I am sending you under another cover the article on French War Literature. I hope I have made it about the right length. The typist took two days, otherwise you would have it already.

Friendly greetings, R. G.

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(9. 11. 1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Je vous envoie d'autre part l'article sur La Littérature française de la guerre. J'espère avoir atteint à peu près la longueur voulue. La dactylographe m'a pris (*? illisible*) deux jours, sans quoi vous l'auriez déjà. Amitiés, R. G.

XV

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I am late, but I have been ill with a vulgar but distressing cold. Mr. Squire replied very kindly and asked me for an article on Verhaeren, which I shall send him as soon as it returns from the typist. Thank you, you have perfect friends.

Have you thought, as a translation, of the book by Jean Variot (killed, he too) entitled *Les Hasards de la Guerre?* It is a novel but composed of a series of episodes and might suit you. Write to the publisher, G. Crès, 116 Boulevard St. Germain, who no doubt will accept your proposals. Thank you for the little things destined for *Poetry* and *Poetry and Drama.* I give you a lot of trouble.

Are you really going to be a soldier? I hope the war will be over before you decide. The other day I saw one of my friends go. It saddened me, and I am still sad. At least you can be sure that you will be well received in France, where the English are received excellently. You will come and see me when you are in khaki?

Did I tell you that Vildrac has been wounded? He is in hospital and is better.

Have you any news of the rich Bostonian?

The English covered themselves with glory in Flanders and roused the admiration even of the Germans.

Good-bye. Very cordially yours,

Remy de Gourmont

Mercredi (10. 11. 1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Je suis en retard, mais j'ai été souffrant d'un rhume vulgaire, mais pénible. M. Squire m'a fort aimablement répondu, en me demandant un article sur Verhaeren, que je lui enverra sitôt que la dactylographe me l'aura rendu. Je vous remercie, vous avez des amis parfaits.

Avez-vous pensé pour une traduction au livre de Jean Variot

Vendredi

Cher Monsieur Aldington,

Je vous remercie et je remercie M. Harold Monro. J'ai bien reçu le mandat et je vais tâcher de faire de mon mieux un article sur The effort of war on Literature Paris.

Je pense aussi à Poetry. Ci-joint deux petites pièces courtes, de "épigrammes", que j'aimerais à lui voir imprimées. Je rédige une courte correspondance.

Quant mieux que la Dame ne soit pas celle que je pensais. Les 1000 fr. me seraient agréable. Trois obligations "Land Bank" seraient à sa disposition. On les estait 390 f avant la guerre. Total : 1170.

Bien cordialement à vous

Albert de Gouvernat

(tué, lui aussi) intitulé, *Les Hasards de la guerre*. C'est un roman mais composé d'une suite d'épisodes et qui pourrait vous convenir. S'adresser à l'éditeur, G. Crès, 116 boulevard St. Germain, qui acceptera sans doute vos conditions. Merci pour les petites choses destinées à *Poetry* et *Poetry and Drama*. Je vous donne bien du mal.

Allez-vous vraiment devenir soldat? J'espère que la guerre sera finie avant que voux ayez pris votre résolution. J'ai déjà vu partir l'autre jour un de mes amis. J'en ai été triste et je le suis encore. Vous pourrez du moins être sur que vous serez bien reçu en France, où les Anglais sont excellement accueillis. Vous viendrez me voir quand vous serez en "kaki"?

Vous ai-je dit que Vildrac avait été blessé? Il est à l'hôpital et il va mieux.

Avez-vous des nouvelles de la riche Bostonienne?

Les Anglais se sont couverts de gloire dans les Flandres et ont fait l'admiration même des Allemands.

Adieu. Bien cordialement à vous,

Remy de Gourmont

XVI

Dear Mr. Aldington:

Thank you for the news. This successful negotiation will be of the greatest service to me, as the Bourse is still shut. Thank you for the transmission, in spite of the high cost of the post (which may be as much as ten francs), at this time it is the surest way. One never knows what may happen to a cheque in this time of moratorium. There are stories of cheques suspended until after the war, which would not meet this situation. And then at the moment I

am unwell, I never go out and the postman will bring me the money to my flat, if you send it by international money-order payable at domicile. I will have the securities sent you as soon as I can go out and take the receipt for the certificate to the bank where they are deposited.

This is a strange negotiation between two poets, is it not? But then is not everything that is going on now strange too? Very cordially yours,

Remy de Gourmont

P. S. I hear that Ezra Pound wants to start an Anglo-French review, in opposition to *Poetry*. Does he think this is the time for it? He is supposed to have some of the necessary money already. R. G.

Jeudi 23 nov 94 (sic)
(23. 11. 14)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Je vous remercie de la nouvelle. Cette heureuse négociation me rendra le plus grand service, la Bourse étant toujours fermée. Merci pour l'envoi, malgré le coût élevé de la poste (qui peut monter à 10 fr), c'est en ce moment le moyen le plus sûr. On ne sait jamais ce qui peut advenir d'un chèque, en ce temps de moratorium. Il y a des histoires de chèques ajournés après la guerre, ce qui ne ferait pas du tout l'affaire. Puis, en ce moment je suis souffrant, je ne sors pas et le facteur m'apportera l'argent à domicile, si vous envoyez par mandat carte international à domicile. Je vous ferai envoyer les titres en question, sitôt que je pourrai sortir et porter à la banque où ils sont deposés la décharge du certificat de dépôt.

Voilà n'est-ce pas, une négociation d'un genre inattendu entre

deux poètes? Mais est-ce que tout ce qui se passe en ce moment n'est pas inattendu? Bien cordialement à vous,

Remy de Gourmont

P. S. J'ai entendu dire (? *que*) Ezra Pound veut fonder une revue anglo-française, en concurrence avec *Poetry*. Il trouve que c'est le moment? Il aurait déjà trouvé une partie des fonds nécessaires.

XVII

(Post Card)

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I thank you for telling me what would please the American lady. I have no manuscript of the *Masques* left, but I still have various essays and I shall look through them to offer her the most tempting. As to translations, take what is right for your work. It will please me. You are too moderate. I do not want to receive more than five pounds. So long as you send them by money-order (payable at domicile) I shall be content.

Friendly greetings, R. G.

(Carte Postale)

(4. 12. 14)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Je vous remercie de me dire ce qui ferait plaisir à la dame américaine. Je n'ai plus aucun manuscrit des *Masques*, mais j'en ai encore de différents essais et je vais me mettre à la récherche pour lui en offrir le plus tentant. Pour les traductions, retenez ce qui convient pour votre travail. Cela me fera plaisir. Vous êtes même trop modéré. Je ne veux pas recevoir plus

(? *que*) cinq livres. Pourvu que vous me les fassiez envoyer par mandat-carte (à domicile) je serai content. Amitiés,

R. G.

XVIII.

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I have received a cheque from *The New Statesman*. Mr. Squire has asked me for another article. I thank you again for having introduced me there. Tomorrow *The New Republic* article. I have only a page (to do). If they pay me directly, I shall send you what is proper for your translation, do as you will. I do not want you to have any trouble on account of your kindness. If this is not satisfactory, I shall tell you and we shall come to some arrangement.

I was surprised that you did not know of the international money-order card. I have received them from almost every known country, including Chili and Mexico. But on enquiry I find you could not know them in England, since they are unknown there, and in the United States. It is a pity perhaps for they are very convenient, at least for the person who receives the money. Let us say no more about it.

I only insisted on this point because I walk with difficulty and go out seldom and then only in a carriage. This year there is no cheque or money-order for me "without any deduction." If illness had not to be paid for more dearly, it would be well. I am not in a state to travel, to give

lectures or even to visit my friends. Everything must come to me without my stirring. And it is possible that my young brother will have to go. Lord Curzon was right to say: "Do not say that the war cannot touch you." It touches me as harshly as anyone.

I am glad about your friend the sculptor. Is he a Cubist? What will become of that after the war? Nothing very good, probably. The war will have strange consequences, you see!

What I should like most would be English periodicals, new or even fairly recent. Here nothing readable appears. I have received a good book from my friend Havelock Ellis. Au revoir and very cordially yours,

Remy de Gourmont

New Statesman not received. I am asking for it.

XVIII

(Paris 9 Dec 1914)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

J'ai reçu un chèque du *New Statesman*. M. Squire m'a demandé un autre article. Je vous remercie encore de m'avoir ouvert cette maison. Demain l'article pour *The New Republic*. Je n'ai plus qu'une page. S'ils me payaient directement, je vous ferai parvenir ce qui convient pour votre traduction, faites comme vous voudrez. Je désire que vous n'ayez pas d'ennuis pour votre aimabilité. Si cela ne va pas, je vous le dirai et nous nous arrangerons toujours.

J'étais surpris que vous ne connaissiez pas le mandat-carte international. J'en ai reçu de presque tous les pays connus, jusque du Chili et du Mexique. Mais, après enquète, vous ne pouvez

pas le connaître en Angleterre, puis qu'il y est inconnu, ainsi qu'aux Etats-Unis. C'est peut-être dommage car il est bien commode, au moins pour celui qui reçoit l'argent. N'en parlons plus.

Je n'insistais sur ce point que parce que je marche difficilement et que je sors rarement et seulement en voiture. Il n'y a pas, cette année, de chèque ou de mandat de poste pour moi *without any deduction*. Si la maladie ne se payait pas plus cher, cela irait bien. Je suis hors d'état de voyager, de faire des conférences, d'aller même voir mes amis. Il faut que tout vienne à moi sans que je me dérange. Et il est possible que mon jeune frère s'en aille. Je serai très malheureux. Lord Curzon disait bien: "Ne dites pas que la guerre ne peut vous atteindre." Elle m'atteint aussi rudement qu'un autre.

Je suis heureux pour votre ami le sculpteur. Est-il cubiste? Que cela deviendra-t-il après la guerre? Peu de chose de bon, probablement. La guerre aura de singuliers conséquences, allez!

Ce que je désirerais le plus, ce sont les revues anglaises, nouvelles où un peu anciennes même. Ici, il ne parait rien de lisible. J'ai reçu un bon livre de mon ami Havelock Ellis.

Au revoir et bien cordialement,

Remy de Gourmont

Pas reçu le *New Statesman*. Je le réclame.

XIX

My dear Mr. Aldington:

I am again late for America. I am so with everything, for I am ill and very, very tired. I am in the most painful state, with strength that grows daily less. I only go out very rarely and all my affairs suffer. And when I tell you that this has gone on for months and months, you will

understand my state of mind. If I have no news of you, no doubt the reason is that you are occupied with Christmas festivities or their approach. The only festivity I look for would be to go down the stairs and take fifty steps in the street. To-day I shall try, but it always seems as if I were dragging leaden shoes. The doctor cannot understand it. All this is to explain to you, very ill, the forced state of delay I am in. When I have written a page I lack courage to continue—and yet it must be done. I have not yet sent the manuscript to the American lady, fearing that I had not read the address exactly. I want to send her the MS of a *Night in the Luxembourg*. Do you think that will please her? It is the only complete thing I possess.

I read your nice verses in *The Egoist*. You have a fine freedom of mind. All my compliments.

It occurs to me that you are perhaps ill. Write me a word if you can. Is this how it should be: Miss Amy Howell, Sevenels, Brookline, Mass.?

A word, soon, I am anxious.

Yours very cordially,
Remy de Gourmont

Mardi 22 dec (1914)

Mon cher M. Aldington:

Me voici encore en retard pour l'Amérique. Je le suis avec tout, étant souffrant et très, très fatigué. Je suis dans l'état le plus pénible, avec des forces qui décroissent de jour en jour. Je ne puis sortir que très rarement et toutes mes affaires en souffrent. Et quand je vous dirai qu'il y a des mois et des mois que cela

dure, vous comprendrez mon état d'esprit. Si je suis sans nouvelles de vous, c'est sans doute que vous êtes pris par les fêtes de Noël ou leurs approches. Moi la seule fête que j'attends, ce serait de pouvoir descendre l'escalier et faire cinquante pas dans la rue. Aujourd'hui, je vais essayer, mais il me semble toujours que je traine des souliers de plomb. Les médecins n'y comprennent rien. Tout ceci n'est que pour vous expliquer, très mal, le retard forcé où je suis. Quand j'ai écrit une page, je suis sans courage pour continuer—et pourtant il le faut. Je n'ai pu encore envoyer un manuscrit à la dame américaine, craignant de ne pouvoir lire exactement son adresse. Je veux lui envoyer le MS *d'Une Nuit au Luxembourg*. Croyez-vous que cela lui plaira? C'est la seule chose complète dont je dispose encore.

J'ai lu vos vers si jolis dans *The Egoist*. Vous avez une belle liberté d'esprit. Tous mes compliments.

Il me vient à l'esprit que vous êtes peut-être souffrant. Ecrivez-moi donc un mot si vous le pouvez. Est-ce bien ainsi: Miss Amy Howell, Sevenels, Brookline, Mass.?

Un mot, vite, je suis inquiet.

A vous bien cordialement,

Remy de Gourmont

XX

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I see our letters crossed. It seems to me too that I notice new delays in correspondence. We shall see more! I cashed the Brookline money-order long ago, but nothing from *The New Republic*. If it is possible, spare me from money-orders! They are a torture. Have cheques sent me at least! They can be transmitted. One has to go oneself for money-orders, and I cannot walk.

I should like a neat and faithful translation of Lucretius, *de natura.* Thomas Creech's! Does it exist? I will write you about the article. The French periodicals are so absurd! The *Mercure de France* is suspended. There is still the *Revue des Revues,* but it may take a month, two months! We have nothing.

Yours, R. G.

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(25. 12. 14)

Cher M. Aldington:

Je vois que nos lettres se sont croisées. Il me semble aussi que j'aperçois de nouveaux retards dans la correspondance. Nous en verrons bien d'autres! Il y a longtemps que j'ai touché le mandat de Brookline, mais de la *N. Rep.,* rien. Si c'est possible, épargnez-moi les mandats. C'est un supplice. Faites qu'on m'envoie au moins des chèques! Cela peut se transmettre. Le mandat, il faut y aller soi-même, et moi qui ne marche pas.

Je voudrais une propre et fidèle traduction en anglais de Lucrèce, Lucretius, *de natura.* Celle de Thomas Creech! Cela existe-t-il? Enfin, je vous écrirai pour l'article. Les journaux français sont si absurdes! *Le Mercure de France* est suspendu. Il reste la *Revue des revues,* mais cela peut demander un mois, deux mois! Nous n'avons rien. A vous, R. G.

XXI

(Post Card)

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I was very late in sending you the last article for *The New Republic,* but it was the fault of the post-office which

delayed the copy from my typist. This time I shall not be late. Believe me very cordially yours, R. G.

P. S. Will you re-write, very plainly, the address of Miss A. H.?

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(? Dec. 1914)

Cher M. Aldington:

Je ne vous ai adressé qu'avec beaucoup de retard le dernier article pour *The New Republic,* mais ce fut par la faute de la poste, qui a retardé la copie de ma dactylographe. Je ne serai pas en retard cette fois-ci. Déjà l'article est presque fini.

R. G.

P. S. Voulez-vous me récrire, bien posément l'adresse de Miss A. H.?

XXII

(Post Card)

My dear Mr. Aldington:

You are very kind about my brother, but fate is blind. There is good news of Vildrac; it is even said that he is not wounded but only ill. He has been sent for a rest. Is Duhamel killed? I do not think so. I also saw a Duhamel mentioned among the killed. It is not the same one. There are few unique names in France. I am sending you the *Bulletin des Ecrivains.* You will find reliable information there about everyone. Already, though, there have been some cruel deaths.

It would be very useful to me if my articles pleased in

America. Have they begun to print them? I should like to see a number of this *New Republic.*

Thanks for the calligraphy. What a model.

I am finishing the fifth article.

Very cordially,

Remy de Gourmont

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(30. 12. 1914)

Mon cher M. Aldington:

Vous êtes bien aimable pour mon frère, mais le destin est aveugle. Il y a une bonne nouvelle de Vildrac; on dit même qu'il n'a pas été blessé et seulement malade. Il est mis au repos. Duhamel est-il tué? Je ne le pense pas. J'ai vu, moi aussi, un Duhamel signalé parmi les morts. Ce n'est pas le même. Il y a peu de noms uniques en France. Je vais vous faire envoyer le *Bulletin des Ecrivains.* Vous y trouverez de bons renseignements sur chacun. Il y a tout de même eu déjà de morts cruelles.

Ce serait très bon pour moi si mes articles pouvaient plaire en Amérique. A-t-on commencé à les imprimer? Je voudrais bien voir un No de cette *New Republic.*

Merci pour la calligraphie. Quel modèle.

Je finis le 5e article.

Bien cordialement,

Remy de Gourmont

XXIII

(Post Card)

Dear Mr. Aldington:

Poetry has in fact sent a cheque for 85 francs. It is very

good for the little I sent them. You will receive on Tuesday the sixth the last of my American articles. After that I hope that Providence, also called Chance, will send us something else. Let us rely on the land of dollars. Could I not have a number of that *Poetry?* I should be glad, on account of the verses, which it would amuse me to see in English. Ever friendy greetings,

Remy de Gourmont

(Carte Postale)

(8. 1. 1915)

Cher M. Aldington:

Poetry m'a envoyé en effet un chèque de 85 francs. C'est fort bien pour le peu que je leur ai envoyé. Vous recevrez mardi le 6e et dernier de mes articles américains. Après cela, j'espère que la Providence, appelée aussi Hasard nous enverra autre chose. Comptons sur le pays de dollars. Ne pourrait-on pas avoir un numéro de cette *Poetry?* J'en serais heureux, à cause des vers, qu'il m'amuserait de retrouver en anglais.

Amitiés constants,

Remy de Gourmont

XXIV

(Post Card)

Dear Mr. Aldington:

You are very kind again and I thank you for your new negotiations with *The Morning Post*. Something will succeed when it is wanted. I have not received *Poetry and Drama*. I have received *The New Republic*. The Lucretius would please me. It is for my friend Miss B. who has a

whim to read it, but I too should be very glad to see what shape it takes on in English. You can communicate with prisoners through the Geneva agency. Write in my name to L. Dumur, 36 rue Carteret, Geneva. He will give you all information. I have written to several. I have replies too. Yes, Muller, it is so. Vildrac has not been wounded.

Very cordially yours, R. G.

(Carte Postale)

(10. 1. 1915)

Cher M. Aldington:

Vous êtes toujours très aimable et je vous remercie bien de vos nouvelles démarches au *Morn. Post*. Quelque chose réussira encore quand il le faudra. Je n'ai pas reçu *Poetry and Drama*. J'ai reçu *New Rep*. Le Lucretius me fera plaisir. C'est pour mon amie Miss B. qui a la fantaisie de lire cela, mais moi aussi je serai bien aise de voir quelle tournure cela prend en anglais. On peut communiquer avec les prisonniers par l'Agence de Genève. Ecrivez de ma part à L. Dumur, 36 rue Carteret, Genève. Il vous donnera tous les renseignements. J'ai écrit à plusieurs J'ai encore de reponse. Oui, Muller, c'est bien cela. Vildrac n'a pas été blessé. Bien cordialement votre, R. G.

XXV

(Post Card)

My Dear Aldington:

Did not *The New Republic* definitely order the six articles? Then it ought to pay for them. I wrote them from necessity and it bored me extremely. I greatly regret my time. But do what you can. I have no means of

action against them. The prospect of writing for the *Quarterly* seduces me much more, but especially perhaps the *R. of R.* But let us not indulge too much in dreams. I do not want a money-order for the translation money; send in any form to the *Mercure de France,* 26 rue de Condé, where I have an account. Thanks for all you are doing for me. Friendly greetings,

Remy de Gourmont

(Carte Postale)

(1. 2. 1915)

Mon cher Aldington:

Est-ce que *le New Republic* n'avait pas commandé ferme ces six articles? Alors il doit les payer. Je les ai faits par nécessité et cela m'a fort ennuyé. Je regrette vraiment bien mon temps. Mais faites comme vous pourrez. Je n'ai aucun moyen d'action sur eux. La perspective d'écrire à la *Quarterly* me séduit bien plus, ainsi surtout peut-être, à la *R. of R.* Mais ne rêvons pas trop. Pour l'argent de la traduction, je ne désire pas le mandat; faites tenir l'argent, d'une forme quelconque, au *Mercure de France,* 26 rue de Condé, où j'ai un compte. Merci de tout ce que vous faites pour moi. Amitiés,

R. de Gourmont.

XXVI

My dear friend:

The Mercure de France is resuming publication on the 1st April. I can therefore place the substance of the articles I wrote for America. Keep me informed of what happens to your negotiations. I should greatly prefer

America, for *The Mercure de France* will pay very little at present.

Have I replied to you about I have forgotten which translation also for America? If you can send the small sum agreed on in French bank notes, that would suit me best. If that is impossible, send the money-order or the cheque to *The Mercure de France,* 26 rue de Condé, mentioning on a post card that it is for my account. Although you will not believe me, I walk with great difficulty and hardly ever go out. A cruel position, believe me.

Our last letters crossed. Perhaps it will happen again. Do you think that the communications between the two countries are hindered by the menace of those dreadful Germans? I hope not.

I must tell you that something important is preparing. There will soon be a general offensive. They are massing fresh troops at every point, the English in the north, the French in the centre and east. This must not be announced in the papers.

Naturally, if you have anything to be printed, send it to me for *The Mercure de France.* Mention in the reviews that it is re-appearing. I shall try to get you put on the free list. Very cordially,

Remy de Gourmont

19 février, 1915

Mon cher ami:

Le *Mercure de France* va reprendre sa publication pour le lère avril. Je pourrai donc y faire passer la substance des articles

que j'avais écrits pour l'Amérique. Tenez moi donc au courant des négociations. Je préférerai de beaucoup l'Amérique, car le *Mercure de France* ne paiera que bien peu en ce moment.

Vous ai-je répondu pour je ne sais plus quelle traduction en Amérique également? Si vous pouvez envoyer la petite somme convenue en billets de banque français, ce serait ce que me plairait le mieux. Si cela est impossible, envoyez le mandat ou chèque au *Mercure de France,* 26 rue de Condé, en indiquant sur une carte postale que c'est à mon compte. Quoique vous ne veuillez pas le croire, je marche très difficilement et je ne sors presque jamais. Position cruelle, croyez-le.

Nos dernières lettres se sont croisées. Il va peut-être en être encore de même. Croyez-vous que les correspondances entre les deux pays soient entravées par les menaces de ces affreux allemands? J'espère que non.

Je vous dirai que quelque chose d'important se prépare. Il va y avoir prochainement une offensive générale. On masse de troupes nouvelles sur tous les points, les Anglais dans le Nord, les Français au centre et à l'Est. Il ne faut pas que cela soit annoncé dans les journaux.

Naturellement, si vous avez quelque chose à faire imprimer, envoyez-moi-le pour *le Mercure de France.* Cela (qu'il reparait) dites-le dans les revues. Je tâcherai de vous faire avoir le service.

Bien cordialement,

Remy de Gourmont

XXVII

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I thank you more and more. I have confidence in your arrangements. You should have received the parcel of *Promenades Littéraires.* I had volumes 1 to 4 only put

in, since you tell me you have volume 5. The books certainly contain a number of articles which might interest the English literary public. What you tell me about Mr. Greenslet and the *Atlantic Monthly* pleases me.

I have already spoken to the editor of the *Mercure* about an article from you soon, "the possibility" of which you announced to me some time ago. As to that you mention to-day on the Imagists, it will go in easily. But perhaps it will have to be linked up—how?—with the war. In France now there has to be an excuse for concerning oneself with poetry. But you will not be in a difficulty. Remains the question of translation. This is rather a difficulty, as I do not know English very well now. There again we shall see.

I have never heard it said that the English have been ill received in France. It is just the opposite. But in general the French peasants do not like "strangers" whether English or French. Everyone who is not from their own district exasperates them. But at heart they are worthy people and I do not think there is any difference made between a French soldier and an English soldier. But the language remains an obstacle to complete sympathy, or rather to fraternizing. But what folly to judge a whole nation from some little incident.

Very cordially yours,

Remy de Gourmont

27 février 1915

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Je vous remercie toujours de plus en plus. J'ai confiance dans

vos démarches. Vous devez avoir reçu maintenant le paquet des *Promenades Littéraires*. J'y ai fait mettre les tomes 1 à 4, seulement, puisque vous me disiez posséder le tome 5. Il y a certainement dans ces volumes quantité d'articles que peuvent intéresser le public lettré anglais. Beaucoup me plait ce que vous me dites de M. Greenslet et de *l'Atlantic Monthly*.

J'ai déja parlé au directeur du *Mercure* d'un article prochain de vous, dont vous m'aviez annoncé "la possibilité" il y a quelques temps. Quant à celui que vous m'annoncez aujourd'hui sur les Imagistes, cela ira tout seul. Mais il faudrait peut-être—comment—rattacher cela à la guerre. En France, il faut maintenant une excuse pour s'occuper de poèsie. Mais vous ne serez pas embarrassé. Reste la question de la traduction. Cela m'embarrasse assez car je ne sais plus très bien l'anglais. Enfin, là encore nous verrons.

Je n'ai jamais entendu dire que les Anglais aient été mal reçus en France. C'est tout le contraire. Mais en général les paysans français n'aiment pas les *étrangers*, que ceux-ci soient anglais ou français. Tous les gens qui ne sont pas du pays l'exaspèrent. Mais au fond, ce sont de braves gens et je ne crois pas qu'ils fassent de différence entre un soldat français et un soldat anglais. Mais le langage demeure toujours un obstacle à la sympathie totale, ou plutôt à la camaraderie. Mais quelle manie de vouloir juger tout un peuple sur quelque petit incident.

Cordialement à vous,

Remy de Gourmont

XXVIII

(Post Card)

My dear Aldington:

Let M. de B. do the translation. He is a good writer.

The Imagists must be made known in France. If you can attach the article to Coleridge, Scott and the war during the First Empire, it will do. Moreover in a few numbers the *Mercure* will be freer.. An article on Anglo-French friendship would certainly be welcomed. I shall write at more length soon. Friendly greetings,

R. de G.

(Carte Postale)

(3. 3. 1911)

Mon cher Aldington:

Faites traduire par M. de B. C'est un bon écrivain. Il faut faire connaitre les Imagistes en France. Si vous pouvez rattacher l'article à Coleridge, Scott, la guerre sous le premier Empire, cela ira. D'ailleurs dans quelques Nos le *Mercure* sera plus libre. Un article sur les amitiés franco-anglaises sera certainement bien accueilli. Je vous ecrirai plus longuement bientôt.

Amitiés, R. de G.

XXIX

(Post Card)

My dear Richard Aldington:

I thank you, and congratulate you on your solid article in *The Little Review*. It is certainly one of the best and completest I have read on the complex subject that I am, too complex perhaps to be unveiled in a few pages. Only you, with your clear talent and friendship could have succeeded. This has given me great pleasure.

I hope the article on the Imagists will go in very soon. But I do not edit the *Mercure* and the effective editor is

absorbed by the war. He cannot be made to see that a literary review should remain literary first and foremost. August and September are not a good time to attract the French reader. But is there any good time in these years? You can be sure I shall give the best advice.

Very cordially yours, R. G.

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(? 1915)

Mon cher Richard Aldington:

Je vous remercie et je vous félicite de votre substantiel article dans *Little Review*. C'est assurément un des meilleurs et des plus complets que j'ai lus sur le sujet complexe que je suis, trop complexe peut-être pour être dévoilé en quelques pages. Il n'y a que vous, avec votre talent clair et votre amitié, qui pouviez réussir. Cela m'a fait beaucoup de plaisir.

J'espère que l'article sur les Imagistes passera prochainement. Mais je ne dirige pas le *Mercure* et le directeur effectif est tout à la guerre. On ne peut pas encore lui faire comprendre qu'une revue littéraire doit rester littéraire avant tout. Août et Sept ne sont pas d'ailleurs de bons moments pour l'attention du lecteur français. Mais y en a-t-il de bon en ces années? Vous pouvez être assuré que je donnerai les meilleurs conseils.

Bien cordialement à vous, R. G.

XXX

(Post Card)

Remy de Gourmont to Richard Aldington: Thank you very much for the news you give me of M. G——'s for-

tunate negotiation. I have received a pleasant letter from Boston and a collection of pretty verses. You can see that the first number of the new *Mercure* did not permit anything literary. I hope it will not be like this for long. You ask for news of my health. The news is poor. I am only sending you a line for that reason. I am too weary.

Cordially, Remy de G.

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(8. 4. 1915)

Remy de Gourmont à Richard Aldington: Je vous remercie beaucoup de la nouvelle que vous me donnez de l'heureuse négociation de M. G——. J'ai reçu une aimable lettre de Boston et un receuil de jolis vers. Vous avez vu que le Ier nouveau *Mercure* ne comportait pas de littérature. J'espère qu'il n'en sera pas longtemps de même. Vous me demandez de nouvelles de ma santé. Elles sont médiocres. C'est même pour cela que je ne vous écris qu'un mot. Je suis trop fatigué. A bientot et cordialement. Remy de G.

XXXI

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I have lent it to an English lady who wished to read it and she is away. She returns tomorrow and if she has not lent it to any friend, I will send it off at once. If I had had it I should have sent it to you, as your telegram requested. I deplore this mishap. They always happen with borrowed books and, at the moment, so few good books are coming out that people lend them gladly to their friends.

Good about *Poetry and Drama.* Send to the *Mercure* in my name.

I did not understand the telegram at first. Your letter explained the matter. But how does it happen that you have not a single copy left? Think of the article for the *Mercure.* I have announced it and they expect it.

Very cordially,

Remy de Gourmont

Samedi (17. 4. 1915)

Cher M. Aldington:

Je l'ai prêté à une dame anglaise qui voulait le lire et elle est absente. Elle rentre demain et si elle ne l'a pas, elle-même, prêté à quelque ami, je l'enverrai aussitôt. Si je l'avais eu c'est à vous que je l'aurais envoyé, comme le demandait votre dépêche. Je déplore ce contre-temps. Il arrive toujours des malheurs avec les livres prêtés et, en ce moment, on reçoit si peu de bons livres qu'on les communique volontiers à ses amis.

C'est très bien pour *Poetry and Drama.* Envoyez au *Mercure* à mon nom.

D'abord, je n'ai rien compris au télégramme. Votre lettre m'explique la chose. Mais comment se fait-il que vous n'ayez plus un seul exemplaire? Pensez à l'article pour le *Mercure.* Je l'ai annoncé et on l'attend. Bien cordialement,

Remy de Gourmont

XXXII

(Post Card)

Mr. dear Mr. Aldington:

First, thank you for the good news. I will accept the

price *Foreign Opinion* offers. The translations must be thought of. There I rely on you.

Translate anything you like from the last *Mercure*. It is a "war number."

The Imagists are found. It will be sent to you tomorrow.

Friendly greetings, R. G.

(Carte Postale)

(18. 4. 1915)

Mon cher M. Aldington:

Merci d'abord pour la bonne nouvelle. J'accepterai le prix que l'on m'offira à *Foreign Opinion*. Il faut penser à les traductions. Pour cela je m'en rapporte à vous.

Traduisez tout ce qu'il vous plaira du dernier *Mercure*. C'est un "numéro de guerre."

Retrouvé les Imagists. On vous les enverra demain.

Amitiés, R. G.

XXXIII

(Post Card)

My dear Mr. Aldington:

I have received a cheque from *The Boston Transcript*. You did well to return that of *The New Republic*. The cheque is for 120 francs. I hope this complicated affair will be settled honourably. It would please me if I had one or two American reviews to which I could send an article from time to time. And *Foreign Opinion?* I fear I make use of you, but you can count on me for France. I await your article for the *Mercure*. I have spoken in

La France of the Imagists and of the number of *The Egoist,* which greatly interested me.

Compliments and friendly greetings, R. G.

(Carte Postale)

(5. 5. 1915)

Mon cher M. Aldington:

J'ai reçu un chèque du *Bost. Trans.* Vous avez bien fait de retourner celui de la N. R. Le chèque est de 120 fr. J'espère que cette affaire compliquée finira par se liquider honorablement. Il me serait agréable d'avoir une où deux revues américaines où je pourrais envoyer de temps en temps un article. Et *For. Op.?* J'ai peur d'abuser de vous, mais vous pouvez compter sur moi en France. J'attends votre article pour le *Mercure.* J'ai signalé dans *La France* les Imagists et le No de *L'Egoist,* qui m'a bien intéressé. Compliments et amitiés, R. G.

XXXIV

Dear Mr. Aldington:

I have not written to you for a long time. We have had it hot early this year which has overwhelmed me. In such weather I am dead. I have to thank you first of all for the 500 francs from America which the *Mercure* has received. Moreover I have received another cheque from *The Boston Transcript:* a little less than 40 francs. I do not understand this payment. Why 37 francs for one article and over a hundred francs for another? The high American prices are not very high and they are very variable. But it is all well, since it is unexpected.

What has become of the article you were to send the

Mercure about the Imagists? It is going to start publishing literary articles, the editor tells me. It is the right moment then to give the Imagist manifesto. In my opinion at least half the review should have been given up to literature long ago. There is still a public which is looking for disinterested reading, and I know it had hoped the *Mercure* would give it. The newspapers suffice to tell us about the war. It is true one cannot say everything one thinks even in the *Mercure,* and perhaps this is not the moment to do so.

I sent you, to *The Egoist,* my little improvised book, *La Belgique Littéraire.* I think its chief merit is that it is well printed and forms an agreeable little book to the eye. I hope the Belgians will be indulgent, perhaps flattered.

French literature is still in a state of atrophy, still silent.

Very cordially,

Remy de Gourmont

(Dimanche (13. 8. 1915)

Cher Monsieur Aldington:

Il y a bien longtemps que je ne vous ai écrit. Nous avons eu des chaleurs précoces qui m'ont accablé. Et par un tel temps je suis mort. J'ai à vous remercier d'abord des 500 fr. américains que le *Mercure* a très bien reçus. D'autre part, j'ai reçu un nouveau chèque du *Boston Transcript:* un peu moins de 40 fr. C'est un compte que je ne comprends pas très bien. Pourquoi un article 37 francs et un autre plus de cent francs? Les hauts prix américains ne sont pas très élevés et ils sont très variables. Enfin tout cela est encore très bien puisque c'est inattendu.

Que devient l'article que vous vouliez donner au *Mercure* sur les Imagists? Il va recommencer à publier des articles littéraires, m'a dit le directeur. C'est donc le moment de donner le manifeste imagiste. A mon avis il y a longtemps qu'on aurait du reserver au moins la moitié de la revue à la littérature. Il y a toujours un public qui cherche des lectures desintéressés, et je sais qu'il avait espéré que le *Mercure* lui donnerait cela. Les journaux suffisent à nous parler de la guerre. Il est vrai qu'on ne peut même dans le *Mercure,* dire tout ce que l'on pense, et que ce n'est peut-être pas le moment.

Je vous ai envoyé, à l'Egoist, mon petit livre improvisé, *la Belgique Littéraire.* Je crois qu'il a surtout le merite d'être bien imprimé et de former un petit volume agréable à l'oeil. Avouez que c'est déjâ un resultat. J'espère que les Belges seront indulgents, peut-être flattés.

La Littérature française est toujours dans le marasme, toujours silencieux. Bien cordialment,

Remy de Gourmont

XXXV

(Post Card)

My dear Aldington:

I have not been able to answer you. I am unwell. I stay in my room. *Lilith* seemed impossible to me too. *Theodat* would do much better. You had not told me it was for *The Drama.* I am very glad for your initiative.

With best friendly greetings, R. G.

71 rue des Saints-Pères

Mon cher Aldington:

Je n'ai pu vous répondre. Je suis assez souffrant. Je garde la

chambre. Aussi *Lilith* me semblait impossible. *Théodat* ira beaucoup mieux. Vous ne m'avez pas dit que c'était pour *The Drama.* Je suis très heureux de votre initiative.

Avec mes meilleurs amitiés, R. G.

XXXVI

(Post Card)

Can you tell me, dear Mr. Aldington, whether it is possible to buy Aubrey's work, *The Brief Lives of Contemporaries,* and at what price? I have never been able to find it in France. Very cordially, R. G.

P. S. Tell me of a good bookshop.

(Carte Postale)

71 rue des Saints-Pères
(18. 8. 1915)

Pourriez-vous me dire, cher Monsieur Aldington, si on trouve actuellement dans le commerce l'ouvrage d'Aubrey, *Brieve Lieves of Contemporaries* (sic!) et à quel prix? Jamais je n'ai pu le trouver en France. Bien cordialement, R. G.

P. S. Indiquez-moi un bon bouquiniste.

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